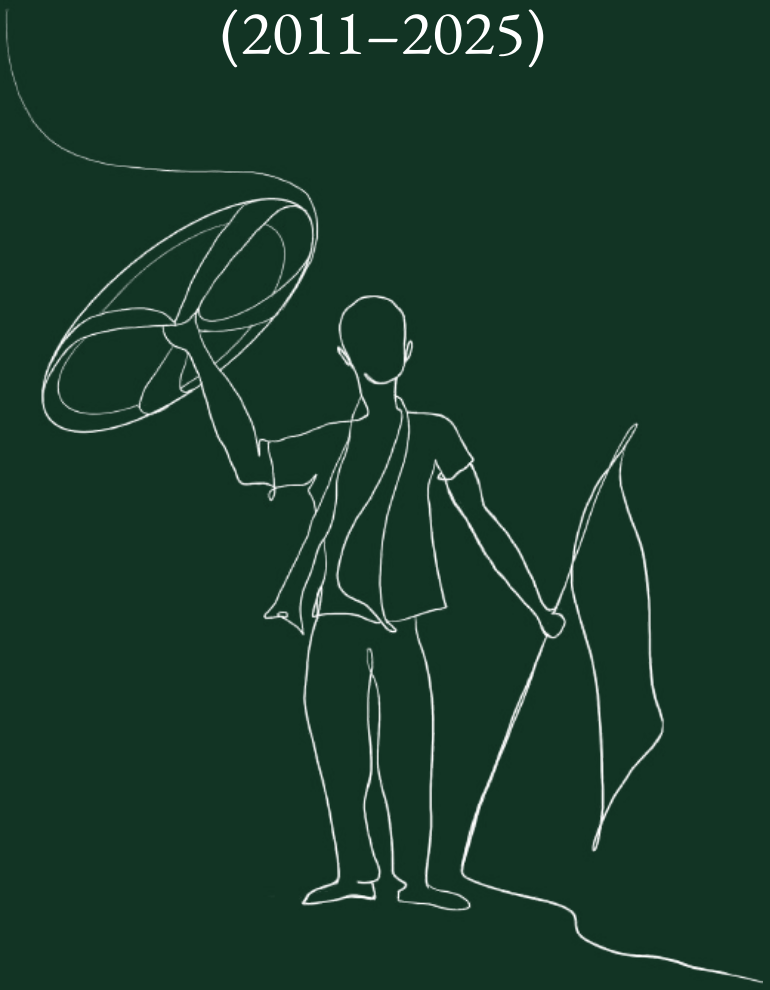
The Maruti Story

Notes on the Workers' Resistance (2011–2025)



CLASS NOTES

The Maruti Story

Notes on the Workers' Resistance
(2011–2025)

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Cover art by Debaleena, based on a painting by Devender, a terminated worker of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant and a part of this struggle since its inception. The original painting is reproduced in this book and can be seen on the page opposite the Introduction.

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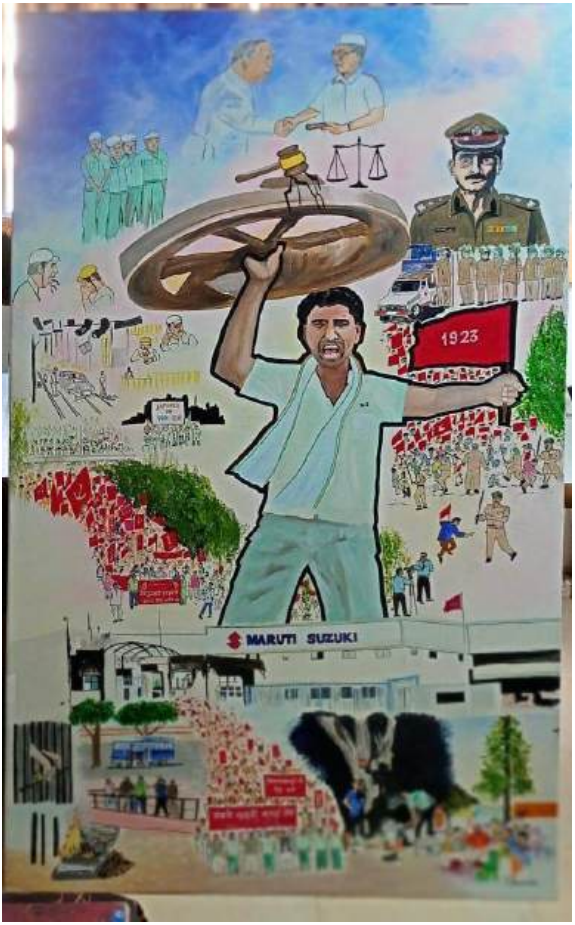


This painting, depicting the many experiences and realities of the workers' struggle, was painted by Devender, a terminated worker of Maruti Suzuki and a part of the struggle since its inception.

Introduction

The Maruti Suzuki workers' struggle has, in the last one and a half decades, never failed to surprise us. Like a phoenix from the ashes, it has risen time and again with renewed militancy, resilience and innovative forms. It has energised workers, activists, and pro-labour forces across the country and beyond. It has also shocked and threatened the capitalist class and the state machinery. This book is our modest attempt at documenting some aspects of this continuously unfolding 'Maruti story' from a working class perspective.

The 'Maruti story' has many versions. R. C. Bhargava, the Chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL), wrote a book which was published in 2010, titled *The Maruti Story — How a Public Sector Company Put India on Wheels*. It is a breathlessly told and hagiographic success story of human resource management and workplace democracy enjoyed by workers. Even paradise has its troubles, though. On 4th June 2011, the workers of the Manesar plant of Maruti Suzuki went on strike and occupied the entire plant. They demanded the right to form a union, and continued their occupation for 13 days, dealing a devastating blow to the Maruti Suzuki management. Thereafter, another two rounds of strikes and

factory occupations took place not only in the Manesar plant but also in three other subsidiaries of Suzuki. Production collapsed. The supply chain was crippled. This is the workers' (sub)version of the 'Maruti story.' Later, in the beginning of 2012, their union — the Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU) — was registered on 23rd February 2012, and 1st March was commemorated as Flag Day at the factory gate.

Then came the events of 18th July 2012, where a clash between the workers and management-hired goons took place on the shop floor, the factory caught fire, and a Human Resources manager died of asphyxiation. It sent shockwaves throughout the capitalist class, the government, and the media. R. C. Bhargava described the events of that day as 'class war.' 2,300 workers, 546 permanent and 1,800 contract, were terminated from jobs without any enquiry. Heavy state repression and criminalisation of the trade union movement followed in the industrial belt and production took place in the sights of CRPF and CISF guns. Subsequently, more than 150 workers were made political prisoners of class struggle; 13 of them, including all 12 union representatives of Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), were charged with murder and given life-terms in 2017 despite lack of substantial evidence.

Yet, the historic struggle for justice fought by Maruti workers has continued for more than a decade. Over the course of the struggle, they developed class solidarity with other factory workers, workers' organisations, and democratic forces across

the country and beyond, and became a symbol of militant working-class resistance. The union was reinstated in 2014. The legal battle in trial and labour courts continues. And, as we write this book, a new movement of non-permanent workers of Maruti Suzuki has asserted itself as a new and important tendency in contemporary trade union struggle.

A real and concrete step forward in an active movement can often raise questions and ideas that many years of discussions are unable to reach, and this is what we see with the Maruti movement. In addition, this movement exposed the underbelly of so-called development in India's most profit-making and sophisticated sector; the fault-lines in the contemporary production and labour regime as well as the established trade union movement; the limits of the trade union framework and the criminal justice system.

Many of us at *Class Notes* have been fellow travellers of the Maruti struggles for years. The movement connected many of us in different parts of the country. The *Class Notes* initiative was conceived in December 2024, at the same time when the terminated non-permanent workers were engaged in a *dharna* at the Manesar *tehsil* for months. At this juncture, we felt it was important to compile this book to archive some important aspects of the movement, drawing on the insights of workers and trade union activists who were active in the Maruti workers' struggle since 2011, while at the same time placing this movement in the context of contemporary class struggle.

There have been many publications on the Maruti Suzuki workers' struggle that have covered different phases or parts of it, from varying perspectives. While recognising the vast span of the movement and the rich experiences it offers, in this book we have tried to cover the entirety of it as best as we could. On the website for *Class Notes*, we plan to carry out a more comprehensive archival work of this ongoing struggle in the coming days. The experience of the Maruti workers' struggle is an important entry point to productive conversations around contemporary class struggles in India, particularly in the organised sector, for the radical left forces, activists, students, and anyone who wants to take serious notes on class politics today.

The *Class Notes* Collective

4th June, 2025

The Factory

That Put India On Wheels

In the popular press, Maruti Suzuki's production facilities in Gurgaon and Manesar in Haryana, India have often been described as having "put the auto industry on wheels." In this section, we briefly discuss the context and conditions within which the 2011 workers' struggle took shape: the development of Maruti Suzuki's brand and its production networks, and the conditions of work on the shop floor.

Maruti Suzuki: History and Supply Chain Development[1]

India's auto market started with knockdown production, or an assembly of imported parts, initiated by General Motors and Ford in the 1930s. Hindustan Motors, manufacturer of the iconic Ambassador, was formed in 1942. It was followed by other domestic auto manufacturers, like Premier automobiles, TELCO (now Tata Motors), Ashok Leyland, and Mahindra & Mahindra. The passenger car manufacturing segment was dominated by Hindustan Motors till Maruti Udyog Ltd. (MUL) entered the market in the 1980s. MUL was a game

changer in the Indian auto sector, soon capturing the lion's share of the automobile market in India. In a relatively protected domestic market, the production technology of domestic carmakers was not developed enough to produce compact cars at low cost and with good fuel consumption. This technological deficit prompted the Indian government to approach Japanese carmakers. In 1982, the Indian government and Suzuki Motors had a Joint Venture Agreement and automobile production started through the state-owned manufacturer MUL. Suzuki retained a 26% minority stake. After India's liberalisation process picked up in 1991, Suzuki increased its stake in the joint venture to 50%.

In late 1990s, Suzuki had a major conflict with the Indian government on how the company should be run and who should be appointed to run the company. Suzuki approached both the Delhi High Court and the London-based International Court of Arbitration. Ultimately, the dispute was settled in 1998 with Suzuki increasing its share of control and with high-level Indian management being replaced by Japanese management. This was accompanied by the aggressive implementation of Japanese production techniques and labour processes.

The workers' struggle in 2011, to which we are building up to, is properly situated in a longer history of agitation in the automobile belt which highlighted several concerns that have been taken up repeatedly by workers. The new management's

decisions to implement Japanese production techniques antagonised the then existing workers' union — Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU) — in the Gurgaon plant and, when the traditional wage structure — which provided incentives tied to volume of production — was changed, the unions fought back. The Maruti management was adamant and tried to undermine the union. This triggered a lockout in October 2000 that lasted for 88 days. The struggle was broken by hiring new contract workers in production. This was one of the first instances of the movement towards contractualisation of the workforce in the automobile industry. Later, many worker leaders were terminated from service and the existing struggling union leadership was replaced by what the company considered a more 'pliable' leadership inside the plant. (The reader interested in this period is advised to consult the PUDR report *Hard Drive: Working Conditions and Workers' Struggle at Maruti* published in July 2001.)

Suzuki took control of MUL in 2002–03 when it purchased majority shares of Maruti from the Indian government through the stock exchange. The Indian government subsequently liquidated its position in the joint venture in 2007.

When MUL started production in India, there was no base of auto parts suppliers. Car manufacturers like Hindustan Motors and truck and bus manufacturers Tata and Mahindra & Mahindra had in-house production facilities, manufacturing

almost all the necessary parts internally. MUL, on the other hand, ran not production plants but assembly plants. Initially, MUL started production with welding and painting equipment, importing all other parts from Japan; only tyres and batteries were procured domestically.

According to the 'Phased Manufacturing Program' promoted by the Indian government to localise auto parts production and to develop a supplier base in India, MUL formed three-way joint ventures between Suzuki, MUL, and parts suppliers. For example, windshield production uses a technology called 'zone toughening,' courtesy of which, upon impact, different parts of the windshield crack into differently sized chunks. This technology was brought from Japan and shared with supplier companies to produce windshields in India. Similarly, it stimulated the production of plastic bumpers, replacing the previously-used metal bumpers, through its local supply chain. Economic liberalisation in the 1990s changed this situation, and the Phased Manufacturing Policy ended in 1992. By then, a stable base of local vendor companies capable of producing quality parts was developed. Liberalisation also ensured the entry of global suppliers who would produce parts in India.

Maruti Suzuki now procures more than 90% of its required auto parts locally and imports the remaining parts mainly from Japan. Many Tier-1 Japanese vendor companies import critical parts from Japan to assemble their products in India. For

example, Denso, which manufactures quality Electronic Control Units (ECUs), injectors, and fuel pumps for leading car makers like Maruti Suzuki and Honda, procures parts like die casts and plastics locally, but it primarily imports critical parts from Japan to assemble in India.

Maruti Suzuki has around 400 Tier-1 suppliers in the present day, and these in turn have a few thousand Tier-2 suppliers. The Tier-1 suppliers have their own supply chains and assembly processes. For example, Sona Koyo Steering Systems Ltd. (now known as JTEKT India Ltd.) had 205 suppliers of parts in 2018, among them 174 domestic and 31 foreign firms, for its steering assembly. Then there are Tier-3 suppliers manufacturing sub-components, chemicals for paints, alloy steel and other raw materials. The supply chain has backward linkages to further lower-tier suppliers comprising: micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs); informal slum-based production; and home-based production. So, the actual number of Maruti workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Neemrana belt — taking into account workers in vendor production facilities — number a few lakhs, in contrast to the official figure of around 30,000 in three assembly plants.

This production network spans all scales — the regional, national, and global. Original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) like Maruti Suzuki procure parts mostly from local-regional production networks, with some additional

procurement from different parts of the country as well as from outside the country. Today, almost 85% of Maruti Suzuki's components (by cost) come from within one hundred kilometers of its Gurgaon and Manesar factories. Just-in-Time production requires close collaboration and swift delivery as it works with a low inventory model to cut the significant cost involved in maintaining an inventory. Some 4,000 trucks supply components and materials to two facilities of Maruti Suzuki (in Gurgaon and Manesar) every day, carrying roughly 39,000 consignments of metal, rubber, plastic, glass, and so on to be assembled into cars. A disruption at any point in the supply chain has its consequences; in the time of global production networks, the disruption need not be local. For example, when the nuclear disaster happened in Fukushima, one of the affected plants in Japan used to supply chemicals to a vendor company that in turn used to supply paints to the paint shop of Maruti Suzuki. The disruption in production in Japan affected the production in Maruti Suzuki's factories in Gurgaon.

Among the Tier-1 suppliers of Maruti Suzuki, there are many cases of local suppliers where the aforementioned joint ventures with Maruti and Japanese supplier companies in the initial period shaped their trajectory and contributed to their growing importance in production networks, leading to them eventually emerging as global players or merging with multinationals. Examples are Motherson Sumi, Asahi Glass,

Amtek Auto, Subros, Sona Koyo, and Jay Bharat Maruti. Maruti Suzuki, over 40 years, has developed the most elaborate and complex automobile supply chain in India.

Inside The Factory

Maruti Suzuki — Manesar Plant

The Manesar plant of Maruti Suzuki in Haryana is currently India's largest manufacturing facility by volume of production. It spans over 600 acres and produces vehicles for both domestic and international markets. The facility has three manufacturing plants: A, B, and C. A new assembly line was recently added in 2024, increasing the plant's total production capacity to 900,000 vehicles per annum. The plant manufactures a variety of Maruti Suzuki models, including the Brezza, Ertiga, XL6, Ciaz, Dzire, Wagon R, S-Presso, and Celerio. Production starts at the press shop, and then moves to the welding shop, the paint shop, and finally the assembly shop. Engines come from the Maruti Suzuki Powertrain plant, situated just beside the Manesar car plant.

Production in the Manesar plant commenced with plant A in 2006, and afterwards plant B and C were set up in the years 2011–12 respectively. This tripled production by the unit. By the end of the decade, the per-shift output of each of the plants was close to 500 vehicles. In addition to this, the first plant (A) has a 'flexi-line', enabled for manual operation which can churn out another 260 vehicles per shift in the case of urgent requirement. This was installed in 2015. By then, out of a total labour strength of close to 8,000 personnel, only 1,800 workers

Maruti Suzuki Manesar Plant — Aerial View [stock image]

Automation within the Manesar Plant.

were permanently employed. Others were absorbed in a temporary capacity on the company's rolls or were hired through different contractors.

The plant is infamous for dividing workers into categories that are created for the purpose of fragmenting their unity; while the titles and pay vary (sometimes wildly), the nature of work assigned to various categories of temporary workers, including student trainees and apprentices, is very similar (or even identical) to that of the permanent workers. Most temporary workers and trainees are involved in work in the core production process that is essentially perennial in nature. A new worker is put into the main production process after just a week of training in foundational information and basic capacity-building. After that, experienced workers train the new worker for two or three weeks, during which time the new worker participates in the production process as much as his more experienced co-workers.

On the Shop Floor

Automobile manufacturing proceeds through various steps taking place in different dedicated workshops. These workshops have different levels of labour-intensive work and mechanisation.

The 'press shop' processes sheet metal a couple of days ahead of use in production. It has a high degree of automation and

Assembly process — Workers in an assembly line on the shop floor in Manesar Plant [Team-BHP website].

advanced machinery which can carry on a variety of functions without human intervention, even for complex functions that require changing tools to process different kinds of components. The high degree of mechanization does provide some scope for relief for workers compared to other workshops.

After the press shop, the material is sent to the weld shop where the work has traditionally been tougher. This has also changed over time as the second (B) and third (C) plants have moved towards relying on robots, as compared to the first which employed about three hundred welders to weld the body parts by hand. The number of positions in the weld shop has halved every six years since production started due to this shift. A similarly high degree of mechanisation can be witnessed in other processes such as painting.

The lifeline of the manufacturing process lies in assembling the different components into the final product which happens on the assembly line. The degree to which the lean and just-in-time models of production have impacted the work process can be witnessed on this assembly line. There are many stations, each requiring one person performing one or many simple (though strenuous) tasks. The Toyota production system came up with the concept of 'takt time': the time required to produce one unit at a speed such that the amount produced is equal to consumer demand. It is a measure that links production directly to market demand. It is thought of as

the ‘pulse rate’ or ‘heart beat’ of the manufacturing process. For the worker, this translates into finishing a series of functions within a very strictly defined and absurdly short time period at his workstation, determined by the speed of the assembly line. In the initial years of the Manesar plant, the standard takt time for the production of a car in Maruti was *under a minute*.

To illustrate what this looks like for a worker on the shop floor, consider the following example from the engine shop. In just two minutes, a worker has to: lift a 30 kg block, place 4 bolts, check 12 others, tighten all 16, put the block back, put a pin on the crankshaft, place an 8 kg flywheel in a specific orientation, fix six bolts, place and align a plate on the flywheel, remove some pieces and one more bolt, and finally place the block on a palette. In these shop floors, cutting edge manufacturing technology and high-intensity work made possible due to the availability of cheap labour: more than 5,000 robots rub shoulders with around 6,000 permanent and around 29,000 non-permanent workers now.

Innovation, Expertise, and Growing Labour-Disposability

Technological innovation and the introduction of machines in the labour process has always served the interest of maximising profit rather than easing the burden of labour. This is well illustrated in the trajectory of mechanisation witnessed in the

automobile sector in the country. The development of the production process in the Maruti Manesar plant is a very concrete example. Despite progressive automation, the workload has not reduced for the workforce in the plant. The work is differentially distributed within the workforce across casual, contract, trainees, apprentices, and permanent workers. The most demanding physical tasks are assigned to the huge force of non-permanent labour, and the decision to introduce automation in a task is determined not by how dangerous or demanding the task is for a worker, but by concerns of precision and quality. Workers work to feed the machines with heavy components and carry them up and down the production facility, even as easier tasks such as refuelling have been automated. This is also due to the cheap labour available in a country like India, whose USP in the global production network is precisely its supply of cheap and disposable labour.

Operating machines in a highly automated work process often means that while each worker is doing a number of tasks with the use of machines, they are not necessarily acquiring a wider set of skills; in fact, the rise in automation often leads to a labour force that is getting progressively de-skilled. This ties multitasking to de-skilling and is also the basis for greater reliance on informal employment in the sector.

In the case of Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant, expansion in production and the establishment of two new plants has worked in a way that the increase in mechanisation and

automation has not led to an immediate reduction of the labour force. The same labour force which was made superfluous in one task is accommodated into another task due to expanding demand.

The first plant remains the most labour-intensive, having the largest number of permanent employees, but certain functions in the first plant are now being automated. The second and third plants are ahead in terms of the automation of different functions, from metal pressing to welding to assembling to painting. Employment in these latter plants is also more informal: three-fourths of the labour force in the second plant, and an even higher percentage in the third plant, is non-permanent.

The labour process, however, does require the experience and skill that permanent workers bring to the table. Certain tasks and work stations are crucial in the complicated production process; either in ensuring that the whole process runs in a timely and uninterrupted manner, or in maintaining the quality of the final product. If the first set of tasks is disrupted, even temporarily, this can lead to a significant backlog in production and consequently losses. For example, in Maruti, certain lines in the assembly shop are so tightly scheduled that even two dozen very brief disruptions in the work can lead to significant setbacks in total production. There are other segments of production which cannot even allow half a dozen such breaks. The just-in-time production process itself creates

these heightened vulnerabilities.

The other set of tasks which depend on the experience and skill of permanent workers are those which have a direct impact on the safety of the consumer and where even minor lapses could lead to accidents during usage. These are specially characterised workstations where only experienced permanent workers are stationed and who work under close supervision. Stations related to chassis work and assembling, including fixing fuel pipes, brakes, engines, steering, axles, and head lights etc. are counted under this category of work.

Thus, skill and experience play a clear role in the production process, even though the company management constantly seeks to minimise it to limit the reliance on skilled workers and curb the workers' control over production. At the same time, to minimise defects, the modern production process has sought to incorporate worker feedback into the production cycle itself. For example, a worker has access to a red or yellow flag which they can raise when they detect a defect, either to stop the production process immediately or to require a supervisor to come to address the defect within two task cycles, which extends to a maximum of two minutes.

The wide variety of car models on offer and their simultaneous production on the same assembly line also poses challenges for a new worker and requires a degree of experience and skill. Attempts are underway to circumvent this reliance on the

workers' skill and experience; model information coded into different models' parts now automatically directs the worker towards the correct components through prompts. In Maruti, this new mistake-minimising mechanism is referred to as *pika-pika*, and it is supported by a vehicle tracking system.

The labour process and the organisation of production in the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant is significant in its impact on the worker's efforts at unionisation, their demands, and the overall nature of their militant struggle. The dynamic contradictions of capital and labour that were born on the shop floor and were fuelled by the strategies and counterstrategies from both sides in the sphere of production was the motive force behind the immanent new tendencies of struggle. Skilled workers had the capacity to influence the pace of production and even stop production, if required. Later, implementation of new technologies from the management's side was meant to reduce the dependence on the skills of workers and make them more disposable. We will come back to this aspect in subsequent chapters. Let us first document different phases of the historic struggle in the next chapter.

The Struggle

That Shook The Indian Ruling Classes

The Maruti workers' struggle since 2011 in Manesar has been one of the most militant, innovative, and resilient workers struggles in contemporary India, spanning almost fifteen years. It reignited a new phase of the workers' struggle for unionisation and better working conditions, beginning at the factory shop floor and eventually confronting both the state machinery and the company management in their demands for justice. The militancy of the struggle in 2011–12 shook the entire capitalist class in the country. Media houses portrayed the workers as 'criminals' and the state machinery started a witch hunt after the incident of 18th July 2012. Workers were jailed on criminal charges; they were in reality political prisoners of a class struggle. They were given exemplary punishments to strike fear in the hearts of the working classes and to comfort the ruling class.

On the other side, the monumental struggle not only mobilised different categories of workers within the Maruti Manesar plant, and other Maruti plants; it also connected to hundreds of thousands of automobile workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial belt, workers

from different industrial areas across the country, other progressive, democratic and revolutionary forces across India, and beyond.

Important markers in this struggle were: the militant strikes and factory occupations of 2011; the formation of the Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union in 2012; the incident of 18th July 2012 and the state repression thereafter; the sustained ground and legal battle for justice; the life imprisonment sentences handed out to the leadership in 2017 and the protests following the event; the re-ignition of the movement in 2023–24; and, the movement of non-permanent workers in 2025.

Here we have tried to document the protracted struggle in five different phases. Each phase marks different forms and strategies of struggle to adapt to the changing situation and demands.

Phase I: Heightened Class Conflict and Class War (June 2011–July 2012)

Background

The Maruti movement follows a long series of movements which have taken place in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera region. The Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU) in the Gurgaon plant was set up after crushing a struggle by the Gurgaon workers in 2000–01. Seen by the workers of the Manesar plant as a "pocket union," it was rejected. The linking of the workers' salary to production-based incentives, the high-pressure work, the constant maltreatment of the workers by the management, etc. had been regular practices of the Maruti management then. After the defeat of the Maruti Gurgaon plant workers' 88-day strike and struggle in 2000–01, there was a lull in the workers movement in the Gurgaon-Manesar area till 2005. The process of contractualisation of the workforce, which was implemented in the Maruti Gurgaon plant to break the resistance, gained momentum in the entire automobile belt. It was during this period that the Manesar industrial belt developed with the establishment of the Honda plant and its vendor companies there. The Honda Manesar plant workers' struggle for union formation in 2005 broke the lull. The unity of permanent and contract workers in the Honda struggle, and its militant and

uncompromising character shook the Japanese management. On 25th July 2005, a workers' gathering faced massive *lathi* (baton) charge and police repression, and hundreds of workers were seriously wounded. The video footage of that repression created ripple effects in the national and international arena. Gurudas Dasgupta, the then AITUC leader and Member of Parliament, showed a blood-soaked dress of a wounded worker during the parliament session. Ultimately, the Honda management retreated and accepted the demands of the workers.

The initial success of the movement in Honda provided an opportunity for the establishment of unions in many other companies. By 2009, there were 60–70 active unions, mostly affiliated to AITUC and HMS, in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt. The 44-day strike in Rico (along with the strike in Sunbeam) in Gurgaon in 2009 was another watershed event in the workers movement in this belt. Rico Auto was a global supplier of aluminium auto-components and the strike created ripple effects throughout the global production networks. Due to a shortage of materials, General Motors *in Canada* had to stop production for a few days. The company management hired goons to break the strike; they opened fire on the striking workers at the factory gate. Ajit Yadav, a striking Rico worker, died of a bullet injury. This atrocious event triggered anger among workers in the entire automobile belt. The very next day, 15,000–20,000 workers gathered at the Rico factory gate.

More than one lakh workers participated in a one-day spontaneous strike across the industrial belt. But the Rico management was ultimately able to threaten and buy out key worker leaders, and the movement collapsed. The instance in Rico of the leadership accepting settlements and stepping back from the movement led to a phase of despair in the entire industrial belt till 2011 and created misgivings amongst the workers about the ideas of collective struggle and trade union leadership. The struggle of the Maruti Manesar workers started against this backdrop.

Generally, the attitude taken by the company managements in the industrial area towards trade union activity has been either to crush or to co-opt it, disbursing benefits separately to the workers and the leadership in order to gradually dilute their militancy; when this is not feasible, it terminates the leadership from job or forces them to resign through money-power or pressure. The struggle in Honda in 2005 and the militant struggle in 2009 in Rico are some examples along these two lines. The growing numbers of contract (and now different categories of non-permanent) workers in the basic production process of the industry has diluted the power of the permanent workers' unions. The differentiation of grades of workers within the factory, especially the gap between permanent and contract workers and the representation of only the permanent workers in unions has weakened the workers' struggle in the last two decades. In Honda too, after the union was formed in

2005, this gap between permanent and contract workers increased and the participation of the permanent workers in the struggles of the contract workers was minimal. Before the emergence of the Maruti movement, one can see that this trend had been a source of concern among trade union leaders in the belt. But despite this, at the ground level none of the unions or movements could successfully address this problem and this question had become a serious challenge facing the entire trade union movement.

Objective Conditions

Workers' struggles in new industrial zones like Gurgaon-Manesar, including that in Maruti Suzuki, exhibit some characteristics specific to their time. The forms and tactics deployed by these struggles such as factory occupations were novel in this industrial belt. Further, the automotive industry, as we will expand on below, was not stagnant or in a phase of crisis. In fact, production was expanding.

Spontaneous movements have sometimes arisen from a crisis in an industry. Examples of these include the historical movements in the jute or textile industries in Bengal or Mumbai, where the corresponding industries were in a state of decline and restructuring. However, in the automobile industry in the early 2010s, in contrast, there is continuous capital investment, continual changes in technology and labour processes, and the generation of thousands of crores in profit.

There was no major industrial crisis to speak of, which provided leverage for the struggle.

The movements here came out of deepening exploitation within the modern production process. On the one hand, workers' anger increased because of the excessive workload in the factory's labour process, the oppressive disciplinary system of supervisors and management, degradation of work, increasing informalisation and contractualisation of work, a lack of dignity in labour, and a lack of economic and social security and rights. On the other hand, in modern production processes, the young industrial workers engaged in collective work developed an understanding of the company's business and profit margins. They also formed ideas about their own rights, demands, and understood that their ability to inflict financial losses on the company was a source of strength. This fostered unity and experience in working in a collective and organised manner. Finally, there was also an initial advantage in the new plant in Manesar of young workers fighting on new terrain, free from the "burden" of old leadership from the Gurgaon plant, and its standard and 'controlled' ways of dealing with workers demands; there was just enough history for the workers to understand the power of organisation.

Over the last three to four decades, driven by globalisation and the allure of cheap labour and markets, new production centres have emerged in large developing countries like China, India, and Brazil. Foreign capital has invested alongside

domestic capital. In our country, too, capital has invested in those areas with cheap and unorganised labour, where there is no history of worker agitation as a 'de-risking' strategy creating mostly temporary, insecure, and low-wage jobs.

The labour process has also rapidly changed with new technology and management techniques. Earlier there was the "Fordist production system" where thousands of workers under one roof assembled final products from small components and managed inventory. Now, production stages have been decentralised to different companies, areas and countries — creating regional or international "production chains." Maruti cars are assembled at the Manesar plant, but components come from numerous vendor companies: sheet metal from Essar, air-conditioners from Subros, dies from Bellsonica, steering from Sona Steering, suspension from Delphi, headlights from IJL, paints from Nerolac, and knock-down parts from Japan, Europe, and Korea. The manufacture of small nuts and bolts and forging and welding are done in the unorganised sectors within slums. In reality, everyone in this network is a Maruti worker, but only 2–3% are recognised as "Maruti workers." Even among the official Maruti workers, 83% are non-permanent. More broadly, the bargaining power of trade unions in the formal sector, which only include permanent workers in a single factory, has been undermined through the distributed nature of production and contractualisation within the plant itself.

To keep up the continuous level of activity required by this arrangement, a "just-in-time" system is needed. To reduce production costs and increase production rates, the Japanese management technique of "lean production" requires the company to continuously minimize "waste" of time, space, and raw materials. New products require the constant adoption of new technology, "flexible" labour processes and a transiently engaged labour force.

The tremendous burden of this ultimately falls on factory workers. The policy of production of new models at short intervals created a constant pressure on the workers to learn new "skills" (really, adapt to very specific machines, resulting in *de*-skilling) and an increasing number of new tasks. The technological advancement in production also led to an accelerated work pace. So, the situation was ripe for worker unrest at any time.

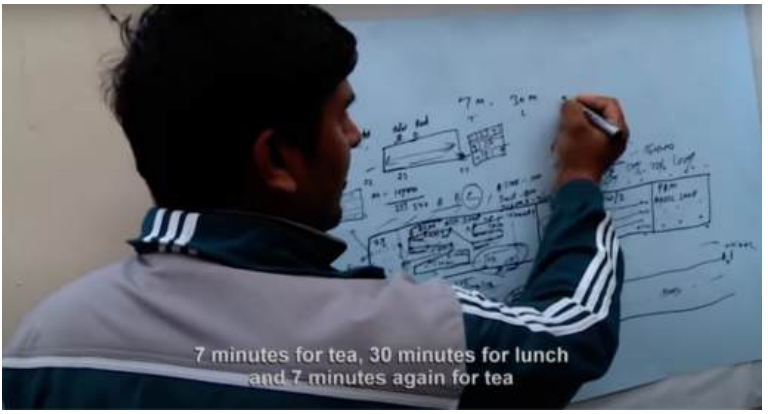
The second important characteristic is that production is no longer restricted to a single factory but takes place through a wide network of companies. In such a situation it is becoming more difficult and less viable to conduct long struggles in any one factory. On the flip side, the distributed nature of the production process also means that steps taken by the workers of any one factory affect the workers of other companies too. For example, as we mentioned earlier, the 2009 strike of Rico led to suspension of production in General Motors *in Canada*.

For the same reason, the struggle in Maruti also spread to other companies.

We see the Maruti workers engaging with these aspects of organisation of production and labour in the factory at different moments in their struggle, particularly in the initial period.

The First Strike and Factory Occupation (June 2011)

On 4th June 2011, the management of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant was thrown into a crisis by a workers' strike and factory occupation. The workers staged a sit-in inside the company to



A worker describes the assembly line and the car manufacturing process. [From Rahul Roy's documentary film *The Factory*.]

4th June 2011 — Workers occupy the plant.

protest the interference of the management in the union registration process. The workers had earlier declined to be members of the then "pocket" (i.e. management-controlled) union (the Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union, or MUKU) of the Gurgaon plant and instead formed their independent union: the 'Maruti Suzuki Employees Union' (MSEU). Office bearers were elected and an application for legal recognition was submitted to the labour department. Throughout this phase of the Maruti struggle, although the MSEU was not yet a registered union, it was the *de facto* union: it raised the demands of the Manesar workers, represented the workers in meetings with the management, and organised strikes.

The factory occupation by the striking workers was a new militant and innovative form in the industrial belt, and startled the management. Earlier in 2000–01, the workers' 88-day strike in the Gurgaon plant was broken by hiring new contract workers. Later this practice was adopted by other company managements. Factory occupation by workers closed off the possibility of using that tactic by the management, and was later adopted by many striking workers in the industrial belt and beyond. The Maruti management responded in various ways, including by closing canteen and even bathrooms and urinals, to force the workers out of the factory. All such measures failed. Workers from other factories supplied food to the striking workers engaged in a continuous sit-in inside the factory. The factory premises became a space for a new kind of

class solidarity, along with indomitable energy and new-found sense of class power. It united around 3,000 workers of the Manesar plant — permanents, contracts, trainees and apprentices — in a collective revolt to realise their aspirations for a union, a symbol of class power for them. 11 union members were immediately dismissed by the Maruti management, but that could not break the strike or dampen their spirits. A committee with representatives of unions and organisations in the industrial belt, first of its kind in the belt, was formed to support the striking workers. The strike in the Manesar plant forced a halt in production in vendor companies in the supply chain. The ripple effect created a crisis situation in other factories all along the supply chain. The Maruti management, considered one of the harshest managements in the industrial belt, had to step back in the face of the 13-day long strike. Not only was it compelled to engage in talks with the union representatives but to also unconditionally take back all the terminated workers. Even the management had to commit not to interfere with the union registration process. This was a big victory for the workers. After the first strike, there was no agreement on the economic issues, but the worker's control on the working conditions inside the factory significantly increased. For them, this became a distinguishing feature of the force of their unity. This had consequences in the Suzuki Powertrain and Motorcycle plants as well, and both these plants also saw unions being formed during this time. A fresh wind of optimism, after a period of despair since the

defeat of the Rico workers' movement, was instilled among the workers in the industrial belt.

Lockout (September 2011)

The class unity and solidarity and the sense of victory that was developed during the 13-day strike and the subsequent settlement was reflected in the daily operations on the shop floor. The nature of relations between supervisors and workers had changed, and workers, united in their different demands related to working conditions, were no longer afraid of their supervisors. Workers' increased control over the production process threatened the control of the management over the same. For the Maruti management, the settlement after the June strike was a temporary retreat. The management was in search of ways to break the unity and the sense of collective power of the workers, and block union formation in the factory. Having created several obstacles in the production process, the management blamed it on the workers and declared an illegal lockout on 28th August 2011 with the condition that allowed workers to re-enter the factory only if they signed 'good conduct bonds', which included conditions that could pave the way for the management to punish workers in various ways and derail the process of union registration. The workers refused to sign the bonds and started an indefinite sit-in at the factory gate. Many workers were suspended in the course of the struggle. On 14th and 15th September, the two-day spontaneous factory occupation in support of the

movement in three other factories of the Suzuki group — Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Casting, and Suzuki Motorcycle — became an important experience. The strike in Powertrain, which makes engines for all the vehicles of Suzuki, led to a halt in production in the Gurgaon plant as well. This severely affected the management, which tried to break the determination of the workers by spreading rumours of production restarting in the company. But this time, the management was prepared to accept the cost of production losses to break workers' resistance. This time, ultimately after more than one month, the workers blinked first. Due to the difficulties of staying out of work for a long time, the union on 30th September 2011 decided to sign 'good conduct bonds' the management was insisting on and resume work.

The Second Strike and Factory Occupation (October 2011)

The management, in order to strike a definitive blow to the struggle and create divisions among workers, denied the contract labourers entry into the company when the permanent workers returned to work. On 8th October 2011, all the permanent workers occupied the factory again and stopped production, demanding the right of contractual workers to return to work. The workers of Powertrain and Suzuki Motorcycle, where unions were newly registered, occupied their respective factories and declared strikes in

solidarity with Manesar plant workers. What is more, the workers of twelve other companies in Gurgaon-Manesar also declared a strike in support of this agitation. The production in the Gurgaon plant also came to a grinding halt. This was the peak moment of class solidarity and class action in the industrial belt. Around 10,000 workers, joined by more than 70 unions, took out a spirited rally in Gurgaon. Workers across the country took notice of the events and sent solidarity messages. Solidarity messages also came from unions as far as in Japan. Huge pressure was mounted not only on the management but the entire capitalist class in the belt and the entire state machinery in the area. Finally, on the 15th October, the company presented the workers occupying the factory with a High Court order requiring them to vacate the premises. On being ousted from the company premises, the agitation lost some energy and, finding the central trade unions in the area and nearby factory unions unable to give them firm support, the leadership after a while saw only a bleak future for the struggle. Under great pressure mounted by the management, the representatives came to an agreement on 23rd October 2011 for the workers to resume work. An important victory was in the management being forced to take back all contract workers on duty, and revoking the suspensions of other workers during the struggle. However, as a compromise, the then leadership comprising 30 frontline workers were ousted from the factory with VRS-like monetary settlements from the management. Along with this, the President and two other

members of the union body of Suzuki Powertrain were also terminated. The management strategy was to isolate and 'buy out' the leadership, and utilise the same as a psychological maneuver in controlling the workers.

Union Registration (2012)

This was followed by a period of relative 'despair' of being let down by the leadership for workers who were ready to give the young leadership their full cooperation. However, given the retention of most workers steeled in the 2011 series of struggles, this created a basis for new leadership from within the workers (like 'line leaders' from various districts and regions, who practically organized the second and third rung of the struggle), and under more democratic pressures from the rank and file workers. The workers, through this, united once again to form their union. The registration process of a new union, the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) with new proposed office bearers, acquired momentum, as the registration file of the earlier MSEU had been rejected by the labour department on technical grounds. This effort reunited the workers across all categories, and the management had to step back under the

Thousands of workers rally in Gurgaon, October 2011.

Maruti Suzuki workers declare union on 1st March 2012.

heavy pressure put on them by the workers. In the end of February 2012, the union — Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU, registration number 1923) — was finally registered and on 1st of March, the flag of the union was unfurled at the factory gate. The resentment towards the labour department and the company management, which had taken root in every worker's heart after the forced resignations of the previous union leadership, became even sharper through everyday events after the successful registration of the union. Now that the union had started functioning independently, talks on issues such as illegal involvement of trainee and casual labour in regular production, proper holidays, breaks during work hours, residential facilities for the workers, education allowances for their children, etc. started between the management and the union, a process which repeatedly broke down due to the reluctance of both the sides to compromise. The management was keen on demonstrating the ineffectuality of the leadership and the failure of the union to effectively represent the workers, that the framework of the activities of the trade union was under the control of the management and that there was no place in it for the aspirations of the workers.

The Incident of 18th July 2012 and its Aftermath

In the tense atmosphere already prevalent inside the factory due to conflicts in the collective bargaining process on the

workers' Charter of Demands, a supervisor humiliated a Dalit worker, Jia Lal, and used casteist slang. Jia Lal fought back. The union came in support of Jia Lal, and demanded action against the supervisor. The company management took no action against the supervisor, and suspended Jia Lal. The union protested and put pressure on the company management to revoke the suspension order. The intention of Maruti management was to create a deadlock and target the union with that excuse. The company management even called bouncers inside the plant to put pressure on workers. The situation escalated and ultimately led to a clash between workers, the bouncers, and the management. Meanwhile, part of the factory caught fire, and an HR manager, Awanish Kumar Dev, died due to asphyxiation.

This incident triggered state repression on workers on a tremendous scale. The next morning, whoever was seen in the uniform of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant was picked up by the police and put behind bars. In the FIR by the management, 55 workers were named, along with hundreds unnamed workers, and charged with murder, arson, rioting and other criminal offences. A witch hunt of the workers began. The national mainstream media portrayed the workers as 'criminals.' After absconding for a few days, the union body ultimately surrendered. They were tortured during their time in police custody. A total of 147 workers were in jail. Another 66 workers, named in another FIR, were absconding. Apart

Workers arrested and the accused in the incident being taken to court.

from criminal cases against the workers, the management terminated 546 permanent and 2,300 contract workers without any enquiry; the alleged grounds were 'loss of confidence.' Mass dismissal of workers on such a scale, without any scope of self-defense, was unprecedented in industrial disputes. The workers' version of the 18th July incident, documented in the demand notice submitted in Gurgaon Labour Court, has been included in Annexure B at the end of the book. Production halted in the Manesar plant for more than one month. When the production started again, it took place under the presence of a massive police force. Union functioning stopped in the plant.

The incident of 18th July and its aftermath put the Maruti workers in direct opposition to the entire capitalist class, big media, and the state machinery. It was no longer a 'labour dispute,' it was a 'law and order' problem to deal with stringently. Criminalisation of trade union activities continues. 'Class war' took momentum from the capitalist class, and the jailed workers were political prisoners of class struggle.

Maruti Workers' Movement in 2011–12: A New Paradigm

In the reignited struggle in 2011 in Manesar, the demand for an independent workers' union became a symbol of the collective anger of all workers — permanent, trainee, and contract — against exploitation and oppression in the production process,

and their united struggle against it. Along with this, the issues raised by the workers, such as increasing the duration of lunch and tea breaks, reducing the speed of the assembly line, excessive pressure and impolite behaviour from supervisors, and facilities for rest breaks and holidays. These demands emerged from the common experiences of working conditions that *united different categories of workers together*. The workers understood the value of this collective power, reflected in their imagination of a 'union' and what it could do for them, beyond agitating for short-term economic gains.

This kind of conflict is deeply connected to the daily antagonism between labour and capital in the labour process, and to the embryonic stage of class struggle on the factory shop floor. Capitalist labour processes constantly create divisions among workers: permanent/contract, organized/unorganized, local/migrant, assembly plant/vendor company, automobile workers/garment workers, and so on. On the other hand, it is in the workers best interests to break down these divisions and unite against the capital-owning classes. Our country's trade union laws do not permit permanent and contract workers to unite under one union. Moreover, in many cases, traditional trade union settlements exacerbate this division by protecting the interests of permanent workers.

However, if the substance of the movement is indeed a common experience for all workers involved in the labour process, then a real basis for worker unity is formed in that

movement. For employers, meeting these kinds of demands is much more difficult than merely financial demands. Not only that, it is also frightening because it actually increases workers' control over the labour process. The Maruti workers understood this from their daily life experiences. Therefore, after the first strike and the formation of the union, the experience of working with dignity in the factory, the courage to confront their supervisors, a lighter workload, more people working together on a line than before, or the benefit of more "relievers," were as valuable to the workers as a victory on economic demands.

It was on the heels of these substantial successes that permanent workers carried out the historic third phase of strikes on October 8th 2011, demanding the reinstatement of contract workers. And because of a common sentiment at its core, workers from eight companies, including Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Bike, and Bajaj Motors, defied instructions from established trade union leaders in the area and went on "illegal" strikes in support of the Maruti struggle. As a result, in addition to Maruti workers, three workers, including the union head of Suzuki Powertrain, were dismissed. After the union was formed, when workers demanded the abolition of contract labour system (a demand that, though not accepted then, was later acknowledged in 2013 by management, who replaced the contract system with Temporary Workers on company roll), the substance of this bargaining was not limited to mere legal

trade union-level economic negotiations, which the management also deeply understood. The seeds of the July 18th "rebellion" were sown much earlier. The expression of workers' spontaneity in the substance of the movement changed with time and experience. The workers, continuously feeling the hollowness of the labour department, labour laws, and the established trade union system, on July 18th 2012 virtually declared a rebellion not only against management's exploitation, oppression, and deception but also against the entire established legal trade union system. It refused to be contained or co-opted in the shrinking space of economic trade unionism. Their struggle, located in the experiences of common working conditions and demands to take increasing control over production inside the factory, challenged and rebelled against the established paradigm of legal trade union framework.

This development in Maruti Suzuki Manesar was not isolated in this regard, and came on the heels of similar movements in this period across industries: Honda, Gurgaon (2005); Graziano, Noida (2007); Bosch, Pune (2009); Hyundai, Tamilnadu (2010); Allied Nippon, Shahibabad (2010); Ludhian Textile, Punjab (2011); Reliance Textiles, Gujrat (2012); Ceramic Regency, Yanam (2012). In the auto sector specifically, we have: Mahindra (Nashik), May 2009 and March 2011; Sunbeam Auto (Gurgaon), May 2009; Bosch Chassis (Pune), July 2009; Honda Motorcycle (Manesar), August

2009; Rico Auto (Gurgaon), August 2009, including a one-day strike of the entire auto industry in Gurgaon; Pricol (Coimbatore), September 2009; Volvo (Hoskote, Karnataka), August 2010; MRF Tyres (Chennai), October 2010 and June 2011; General Motors (Halol, Gujarat), March 2011. This wave of strikes continued for a few years after; 2013 saw strikes in Hero MotoCorp, Gurgaon (January – March 2013); the powerloom industry of Ichalkaranji (January – February 2013); Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M), Nashik (March 2013); Bosch India, Bangalore (March 2013); M&M, Igatpuri (April 2013); Nokia Siemens, Chennai (June 2013); Bajaj Auto, Chakan (June 2013); Hero MotoCorp, Haridwar (September 2013); and Hero MotoCorp Gurgaon (September 2013).

Militant and Innovative Tactics Challenging 'Legality': from Factory Occupations to Solidarity Strikes

Occupying the factory was one of the major experiments of the movement in this context and the success achieved by the movement in the first strike can be attributed to it. After the occupation of the company by Maruti workers in June and October, other workers also made use of this quite effectively like in the Suzuki Powertrain, Munjal Showa in Manesar, or Ghosi India in Bawal. When the workers realised the limitations of established trade union forms of struggle were proving ineffective, they were inspired to look for other more

adequate and expansive forms of asserting worker's power. Factory occupations, sit-in strikes, solidarity strikes — despite being illegal as per labour law — proved to be an apt medium of taking forward the struggle in this entire region. In such a scenario, we see that at the ground level, the difference between legal and illegal forms of struggle become meaningless.

To strengthen the movement and maintain widespread worker unity, the workers had to recognise the limitations of conventional trade union structures, legal systems, and established trade union organisations, and adopt new forms of agitation, keeping the stage of the struggle in mind. The conventional methods, for example stopping work and picketing outside the gate, had previously faced challenges in companies like Maruti Gurgaon, Rico, Sunbeam, and Denso in the Gurgaon-Manesar area, where management gradually tried to run production with contract workers. This experience motivated Maruti workers to adopt the seemingly "illegal" yet effective method of occupying and staying inside the factory, which was later emulated by workers at Powertrain, Suzuki Bike, and recently Ghosi India in the Bawal industrial area.

Relying on their unity and sense of class power, the Maruti workers engaged in many actions outside conventional trade union procedures and considered "illegal" by labour laws, which proved crucial for the movement's needs. For example, just eight days after signing a "good conduct bond" at the end of the second strike, they completely disregarded it by striking

for contract workers and occupying the plant, and organizing strikes and occupations in support of the movement at the other two Suzuki plants. They also slowed down production during factory operations to pressure management. Other plants of Maruti Suzuki along with many factories in Manesar went on strike in solidarity in October 2011, which is also considered illegal.

The distinction between legal and illegal very often became blurred in the actual unfolding of the movement. However, the workers made use of both these means of agitation in keeping with the requirements of the movement. Both the strikes that happened under the leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) remained beyond the established legal codes. On the other hand, the movement also approached the courts when the need arose and tried to make the most of the few rights available to workers under the country's legal system. In the highly repressive conditions after the arrest later on in Kaithal, the union attempted to use the legal system for ensuring the protection of the struggling workers to whatever extent possible, which was instrumental in instilling greater confidence among workers to take the struggle forward.

Phase II: Repression and Reorganisation (August 2012–2013)

In the atmosphere of repression after the 18th July incident, the workers attempted to broaden the base of the struggle. Step by step, by first uniting workers within the three Suzuki companies, then attempting to build unity among automobile workers in the area through an auto workers' conference, holding a two-day joint hunger strike which included imprisoned workers and those working in the plant, conducting a Haryana-wide cycle rally to involve family members and spread awareness among rural communities, organizing demonstrations and protest days with various labour organisations nationwide, undertaking indefinite hunger strikes, and even breaking barricades and Section 144 to go to jail when necessary, the workers kept the movement broad, relevant, and alive. The use by young workers of union blogs, Facebook, and YouTube for promotion, and teleconferences with journalists, gave the movement significant publicity both domestically and internationally.

To reorganise and lead the struggle for justice in larger society, as any operations inside the plant or in Manesar was not an option, the Maruti workers formed a seven-member 'Provisional Working Committee' (PWC) of MSWU, consisting of terminated workers. This committee took the responsibility to mobilise resources for criminal and labour

cases, organize ground struggle in various forms and organise support from broader sections of society. The workers were being portrayed as hardened criminals. The first task of the movement, apart from court activities, was to change that perception and communicate the condition of workers in jail and in struggle.

The jailed Maruti workers sent the following letter, reproduced in full below, which was published by the Provisional Working Committee of MSWU on 27th March 2013. This letter reflects the conditions and issues confronting the workers in this phase of struggle.

Appeal from Jail
Stand in Solidarity with us for Justice

MARUTI SUZUKI WORKERS UNION
(Reg. No. 1923, IMT Manesar)

We are workers of Maruti Suzuki, who are behind bars since 18.07.2012 as part of a conspiracy, and without any just investigation. 147 of us are inside Gurgaon Central Jail. Since July, 2,500 permanent and contract workers have been terminated from our jobs. In these past more than 8 months,

we have sent our appeal to almost all administrative officials and elected representatives, including Chief Minister Haryana and the Prime Minister of India. But neither have our appeals been heard nor have we been granted bail. The Chargesheet filed by the Haryana police in the Court has no names of any witnesses, and hence is incomplete. This is only a glimpse of the continuous attack on our democratic rights on arbitrary grounds, and we see how law is bent towards siding with company owners. Many of our fellow workers are without parents or guardians, and have been shouldering the entire burden of the household. Many workers' wives were pregnant when we were put behind bars. And even when the time of their delivery came, the workers were not granted bail, or even parole custody. We do not know under what circumstances their deliveries took place. We give a few instances:

1. One of our fellow workers, Sumit s/o Late Shri Chattar Singh, has no one in the family except his wife. Even then, when she gave delivery on 6.12.2012 in a hospital in Gurgaon, the bail plea or parole custody plea of Sumit was rejected.

2. One of our fellow workers, Vijendra s/o Dalel Singh was the lone earning member in his family. His mother stays sick at most times and was not able to accompany or help her daughter-in-law when she gave her delivery on 10.01.2013 in a hospital in Jhajjar. Even then, Vijendra was neither granted bail nor let off on parole.

3. In the case of one of our fellow workers, Ramvilas s/o Late Shri Silak Ram, his grandmother, who fell sick after Ramvilas was put behind the bars as he was too affectionate to her, passed away on 26.02.2013. Ramvilas was not even let off on parole to meet his grandmother on her death-bed or to attend the funeral. After few days when it was the time of his wife's delivery, his request for bail or parole custody was turned down. It caused a mental shock to him.

4. One of our fellow workers, Prempal, s/o Shri Chhiddilal, had the responsibility to look after his family alone, as his family's livelihood entirely depended on his earnings. When he was thrown into jail arbitrarily, his two years old daughter mourning her father's absence, fell sick and breathed her last. This wound was yet to heal, when Prempal's mother aggrieved by the imprisonment of her son and the death of her granddaughter fell sick and passed away. But even after this, Prempal's meager one-week parole leave permission was rejected and he was allowed only a one-hour parole visit on the next day of his grandmother's funeral. His wife, now alone in the house and mourning the death of her daughter and Prempal's mother, fell sick and had to be hospitalized. She is still unwell and there is no one to look after her. It has caused terrible mental agony for Prempal.

5. One of our fellow workers, Rahul, s/o Shri Vinod Ratan, was the only son of his parents, along with a sister. His sister got married on 16.11.2012. But he was not even granted parole custody to attend the ceremony for *kanyadan*. The marriage of the sole daughter took place in an environment of sadness, and Rahul is yet to recover from this wound.

6. One of our fellow workers, Subhash, s/o Shri Lal Chand, was very close to his grandmother. After his imprisonment, his grandmother almost stopped taking food and all the time used to think of his grandson, and passed away in grief some days later. But Subhash was not allowed even to attend her funeral on parole custody.

These and many other incidents that go on daily in our lives are enough to fill up the pages of an entire book.

<u>About ourselves: our identity, family and work</u>

We all are children of workers and peasants. Our parents, with huge effort and sacrifice, ensured our 10th standard, 12th standard or ITI education, helped us stand on our feet to do something worthy in our life and help our family in need.

We all joined Maruti Suzuki company after passing the written and viva-voce tests conducted by the company and on the

terms and conditions set by the company. Before our joining, the company carried out all kinds of investigations, like police verification of our residential proof or whether we had criminal records! Neither of us had any previous criminal record.

When we joined the company, the Manesar plant of the company was under construction. At that stage we, foreseeing our future with the progress of the plant, invested huge energy and diligence to lift the Manesar plant of the company to a new height. When the entire world was struggling under the economic crisis, we worked extra two hours daily to materialize a production of 10.5 lakh cars in a year. We were the sole creators of the increasing profit of the company, and today we are implicated as criminals and murderers, and those who engage in 'mindless arson'!

Almost all of us are from poor worker or peasant families which have been dependent on our job. We were struggling to weave dreams for our and our family's future, such as of our own homes, of the better education for our brothers-sisters and children so that they could have a bright future and ensure a comfortable life for their parents who took the pain to bring after them.

But in return, we were being exploited inside the company in all possible ways, such as:

1. At work, if any worker was unwell, he was not allowed

to go to the dispensary and was forced to continue with the work in that condition.

2. We were not allowed to go to the toilet, the permission was there only at tea or lunch time.
3. Management used to behave with the workers very rudely with abusive language, and used to even slap or make them *murga* [a demeaning form of punishment involving squatting] in order to punish them.
4. If a worker was forced to take 3–4 days leave because of his ill health or some accident or other serious problem in his family or because of the death of a relative, then half of his salary which amounted to almost Rs. 9,000 used to be deducted by the company.

Because of this continuous exploitation, the workers felt the need of forming a Union. Maruti Suzuki company was against the idea of a union, and because of that, three strikes of the workers took place in 2011. After the third strike, thirty fellow workers of ours were forced to resign as they had participated in the strikes. But at last in February 2012 we were successful in registering our Union, in which the then HR Manager, Late Shri Awanish Kumar Dev, helped us. The company was angry with Mr. Dev because of his helpful attitude towards us and as a result, Mr. Dev resigned from the company. But the company did not accept the resignation of him as they were afraid that their misdeeds could get exposed. To crush the union and to remove Mr. Dev from its way, the company with a previously

chalked out plan called the bouncers and hooligans in the factory premises on 18th July 2012 and materialized the 'accident.'

The present situation of the workers inside the Jail

We, 147 workers in total, were thrown behind the bars without any just enquiry, and we are now here for more than 8 months. We are under severe psychological stress inside the jail. Many of us are suffering from diseases like tuberculosis, piles, mental imbalance and several other diseases.

Almost all of us were earning members in our family and we are in jail now. Due to this our families are approaching the situation of dying of hunger. The education of the female members of the family and the children have stopped, which are otherwise their fundamental rights. The future of ours and our families has plunged into darkness. All the members of our families are mentally too disturbed. We are afraid lest they not take any wrong step because of the mental pressure.

The present situation of the terminated workers outside the jail

Apart from putting 147 workers behind the bars, the company terminated the service of almost 2,500 regular and contract workers without any domestic enquiry and these workers are unemployed now. The condition of their families is also very serious. The situation is that they don't have any proof of work

experience, their career is doomed and whoever of them comes forward in our support, he is arrested and jailed immediately (the arrest of Imaan Khan, who was a member of Provisional Working Committee of MSWU and whose name was not there in the FIR, Charge-sheet or SIT report; also the names of 65 workers are under non-bailable arrest warrants). None of the jailed workers or the terminated workers outside have any occupation to sustain the livelihood of people dependent on them and it is putting everyone under mental pressure. Still, against all these odds, the struggle for justice of our fellow workers outside is giving us hope and energy behind the bars. In this struggle that has gone outside the factory in society now for more than 8 months, news of the solidarity that we have received from various parts of the country from workers, toilers and common people has continued to give us hope, and enthused our spirits.

There is no door of any elected representative that we have not knocked in the space of these 8 months. We've taken our appeal for justice from the State Industries minister to the Chief Minister, but the government is bent backwards in trying to take side with the company management and owners rather than listen to us workers. We appeal to the government for the last time, that before we are forced into a situation of committing suicide or killing others, we are given justice which is due to us.

We hope to have your solidarity and your opinion.

Maruti Suzuki Workers Union

(The entire Union body of MSWU is behind the bars of Gurgaon Central Jail, where a total of 147 workers continue to languish without any justice, or even bail. This letter of appeal has been sent from there.)

Attempts at Class and Cross-Class Solidarity

The Maruti workers' struggle had to transform itself from a spontaneous one to a more conscious one to ensure its own survival and growth, particularly after 18th July 2012. The leadership had to constantly change the form and tactics of the struggle in accordance with the ever-changing circumstances. This flexibility in the struggle's tactics and strategy proved to be decisive in its long-term development and resilience.

To briefly recall, during the three strikes in 2011, the workers were confident of their striking capacity, strength, and capacity for mobilisation. The permanent, contract, apprentice, and trainee workers together numbered more than 3,000. During the June 2011 and October 2011 strikes, the workers occupied the plants and sat inside for days together. During a short period of the second strike and during the first phase of third strike, the Manesar plant workers were joined by the workers of

Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Motorcycle who also occupied their respective plants. This forced the entire production of the occupied plant(s) to halt, and thus also seriously affected the production of vendor companies. The entire production chain, with Maruti Suzuki as its central node, was crippled. For example, the strike at Suzuki Powertrain resulted in Maruti Suzuki's production losses of around 1,000 vehicles a day; Maruti Suzuki's production was cut by an estimated 100,000 units in total, and this in turn led to a 39% drop in profits. Also, at different times during these strikes, the Maruti workers received class solidarity in the form of workers of other plants in the industrial area joining demonstrations outside Maruti Manesar gate, rallies in the area, workers' gatherings and even solidarity strikes, as for example on 8th October 2011, the beginning of third strike.

Then there was the setback when 30 worker leaders (including the entire union body of Maruti Suzuki Employees Union) were offered a settlement of Rs. 16 lakh each and were forced to resign. The workers regrouped and ultimately were successful in getting their union (the MSWU) registered on 23 February 2012 and then starting a conciliation process with the management based on a collective demand notice.

The event of 18th July 2012 changed everything. Suddenly, the entire industrial area came under the control of the police. After one month, production literally started at gunpoint and the situation continued like this for some time. Using the

violent confrontation between the workers and management as an excuse, the management threw out 546 permanent and 1,800 contract workers without any enquiry. Among them, the police arrested 147 workers, and 66 workers remained absconding. The workers of Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant were divided into three groups with minimal communication among them: those in jail and absconding, those still working inside the factory but without a voice this time, and those terminated from their job and in the process of regrouping. Sometime after this, a Provisional Working Committee (PWC) of the union was constituted to carry forward and lead the struggle to get those behind bars out of jail and get the terminated workers reinstated once again, and also to initiate the legal battle in the criminal and labour courts. This time, however, the terminated workers did not have the capacity to affect production. They had neither the central trade unions nor the local unions on their side, as the repressive atmosphere proved heavy for other workers and trade unions. Also, the popular campaign in the mainstream media portrayed the workers as murderers, isolating them sufficiently. Thus, they needed to work hard to broaden the arena of struggle to gather strength.

The power of the workers in earlier stages of the mobilisation (as opposed to after 18th July 2012) meant that they had no need then to build alliances *across* different classes. Now, this became necessary. However, the new generation of tech-savvy

Maruti workers used a variety of methods to develop cross-class solidarity, particularly with a section of students and civil society activists. Just before the first strike, the Maruti management gave new smartphones to all the permanent workers. During the strike of June 2011, the workers made videos of both the dismal situation inside the plant and the militancy of their collective struggle and uploaded them to YouTube. During the second strike/lockout, the worker leaders arranged a tele-conference to address the media. They received support from the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, and other colleges in Delhi. The worker leaders also attended public meetings in JNU during this period to address a larger mass of students and teachers. The workers could also successfully campaign amongst a cross-section of society sensitive to the workers' rights via alternative media and regular press releases documenting the daily oppressions on the shop-floor, the inhuman workload, the irrationality of twice-a-day 7½ minute tea-cum-toilet break and one 30 minute lunch break, the absurdity of the variable wage component which constituted half of their salary and could be deducted entirely if even three leaves were taken in a month, and the justification of the struggle for union formation. This allowed the Maruti workers' struggle to emerge as one of the most prominent workers' struggles of India in the recent past.

Not all attempts at developing cross-class alliances succeeded,

however. Let us elaborate some incidents, momentary (failed) alliances, and their outcomes.

First, the workers and their family members in the months of September–October 2012 turned to the established political parties and their leaders, both those in power and opposition in Haryana. They soon realized that these parties would not act against the interests of the corporate houses, particularly Maruti Suzuki, in this case.

Then, the terminated workers, led by the PWC, tried to bridge the gap between different segments of Maruti workers and arranged a common program of a two-day hunger strike by all the workers inside the Manesar plant, outside the plant, and those in jail on 7–8 November 2012. The terminated workers and the family members of jailed and terminated workers participated, but due to various pressures, those inside the plant and inside the jail could not join to make this effort successful.

After this, the workers tried to build a broad-based class alliance with other workers, particularly in the automobile sector, and also with civil society and working class activists in Delhi. They called for an 'Automobile Workers' Convention' in Delhi on 9th December 2012 and pasted a few thousand large posters and distributed almost 40,000 pamphlets in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial region. In this campaign, they not only reiterated their own demands but also

included the demands for right to union formation by the automobile workers in the industrial areas of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal-Noida-Faridabad, the issue of minimum wages, the permanency of contract workers, etc. Though this campaign did not result in large turnout of other automobile workers in the belt at Ambedkar Bhawan in Delhi on the day of convention, this initiative did help the Maruti workers reach thousands of workers and explain their position vis-à-vis the allegations levelled against them. However, they understood that the formation of an impactful class alliance and using this process to challenge the powerful Maruti management and the corporate-state nexus remained a far cry at that point of time.

The MSWU completed its two-day hunger strike and *dharna* on the evening of 8th November 2012 in Gurgaon with a spirited rally.

Jan Jagaran Yatra reaches JNU.

15-day long Jan Jagran Yatra held from Kaithal to Delhi in January 2014.

This required the Maruti workers to build a cross-class alliance in the absence of a strong class struggle as a whole. They decided to reach out to the masses of different districts of Haryana, mostly farmers, in the form of a week-long '*nyay adhikar* (right to justice) rally' from 21st to 27th January 2013. Interestingly, '*nyay*' or 'justice' became the main slogan and signifier during this campaign. They tried to convince people that they had fallen victim to the conspiracy of the management-government nexus and demanded a high-level impartial probe of the events of 18th July 2012. Most of the Maruti workers who were terminated and in jail were from different districts of Haryana. Thus, they already had a social base in different parts of Haryana, mainly in the Kaithal-Jind-Hisar-Sirsa side. The schedule and routes for the cycle rallies were as follows:

- 21st January: Sirsa — Kaithal — Jind — Rohtak.
- 21st January: Narnaul — Mahendragarh — Bhiwani — Hisar — Rohtak
- 22nd January: Ambala — Yamunanagar — Kurukshetra — Sonipat — Rohtak.
- 23rd January: Faridabad — Gurgaon — Rewari — Jhajjar — Rohtak.

And ultimately, in Rohtak, where the then Chief Minister lived, almost 5,000 people including workers, their family

members, relatives, villagers and a section of common people were mobilised on 27th January 2013. This gave the movement a mass character for the first time since 18th July 2012.

The Maruti workers then tried to coordinate different pro-worker sections in different parts of India and sent representatives to various cities like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, etc. and organized an 'All India Protest Day' on 5th February 2013. It was mostly successful. Rallies, protest sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, hall meetings, and press conferences were organized jointly and in support of Maruti Suzuki Workers Union struggle in Delhi (Jantar Mantar, Okhla and Mayapuri), Gujarat (Ahmedabad, Baroda), Maharashtra (Mumbai), West Bengal (Kolkata), Karnataka (Bangalore), Tamil Nadu (Chennai, Pondicherry, Hosur, Tiruchirapalli), Chhattisgarh (Raipur, Bhilai), Uttrakhand (Rudrapur, Haldwani, Haridwar, Ramnagar), Rajasthan (Jaipur), Punjab (Ludhiana, Barnala, Jagraon, Nawanshahr), Daman and Diu (Silvassa), Madhya Pradesh (Indore), Jharkhand (Ranchi), Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow, Bareilly), Bihar (Patna), and Haryana (Kaithal, Kurukshetra, Jind), among others. And although apart from workers organisations and some other progressive democratic organisations, many student, youth, intellectual, and civil rights activists showed support, the mobilisations were mostly symbolic and were principally a result of conscious campaign and co-ordination by Maruti workers and other support groups.

When, due to the continuing repressive atmosphere and the lack of support from central trade unions, it proved impossible to organize a continuous sit-in *dharna* and indefinite hunger strike, the Maruti workers turned to their rural support base. They started a *dharna* on 24th April 2013 and an indefinite hunger strike on 28th April 2013 in Kaithal, Haryana, beside the residence of the then Minister for Industries & Commerce of Haryana, R. S. Surjewala. The indefinite hunger strike was withdrawn after the intervention of the then Chief Minister, but the *dharna* continued. This period was a significant attempt from the workers to build a cross-class alliance, particularly between the workers and peasants. The workers challenged the dominant notion of 'development,' of which Mr. Surjewala was a symbol. They described it as counter-productive for 'employment' and as anti-worker and anti-farmer. In the initial period, to some extent, the workers were successful. Nearby villagers would supply the necessary wheat flour, rice, fuel, *lassi*, vegetables, etc. to the workers to allow them to continue their protest. The workers pressured the village *panchayats* and even the *khap panchayats* to take a

Indefinite hunger strike and demonstration in front of Haryana Industrial Minister's Residence in 2013.

Poster for the 8th May Mahapanchayat [MWSU].

stand. The Maruti workers called for a *Mahapanchayat* on 8th May 2013 which was attended by representatives of both workers' organisations and village *panchayat* leaders. As the press release of the PWC, Maruti Suzuki Workers Union says:

> "In this *Mahapanchayat*, workers and representatives from workers' organisations and independent and Central Unions from all corners of the country participated in our solidarity. These include: Hero Honda Employees Union, IMT Manesar; Rico Employees Union, Dharuhera; FCC Rico Employees Union, IMT Manesar; Suzuki Powertrain Employees Union, IMT Manesar; Bluestar Employees Union and Trade Union Solidarity Committee, Mumbai; Molder and Steel Workers Union, Ludhiana Punjab; NTUI, Mumbai; and CITU, Haryana. Workers organisations and mass student youth and women's organisations like Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra, Jan Sangharsh Manch Haryana, Krantikari Naujawan Sabha, Mazdoor Dasta, Inquilabi Jan Awaaz Punjab, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, DYFI Haryana, Samtamulak Mahila Sangathan, and many others also came in solidarity...
>
> We received support and solidarity from over 150 *panchayat* leaders from across the state of Haryana who came to the *Mahapanchayat*. This has given our struggle a stronger social dimension and we hope that

> this is part of making this struggle a social and political struggle affecting all sections of the toiling masses.

From this *Mahapanchayat,* there was a collective call to *gherao* the residence of the Minister of Industries & Commerce on 19th May. In response, the Haryana government acted swiftly to initiate a crackdown. As the press release by the workers on 18th May 2013 said:

> "But the government has exposed itself by again paying scant regard to any of our demands. It has instead stepped up coercion on those who have come in our solidarity. The grants to 84 Village Panchayat sarpanch from across Haryana who came out in solidarity on 8th May in Kaithal have been stopped and they have been blacklisted for support to 'anti-government activities'. Besides this, in an effort to stop our call for demonstration tomorrow, Section 144 has been slapped from 5pm on 18th May to continue till night 12 o'clock on 19th May, and hundreds of police in battle-gear and tear-gas have been posted threateningly next to the site of the dharna.

The police picked up 111 workers and activists from the place of *dharna*, took them into police custody and then to jail custody for violating Section 144 and other offences. Next day, police brutally *lathi*-charged the workers, their parents and relatives, including women, and dispersed a mobilization of a

few thousand. 11 workers and associates were arrested that day and framed under various charges, including attempt to murder. After this crackdown, *panchayat* leaders withdrew from the struggle. *Khap panchayats* said that they were unable to consider the issue of Maruti workers as they were busy with the reservation issue. The administration also did not allow the workers to continue the *dharna* in Kaithal anymore. The alliance floundered. Later on, from 2nd July to 11th July 2013, the workers tried to organize a series of protests in Kaithal, Faridabad, Kurukshetra, Rewari, and Chandigarh, but the response was not like before. Much later, the workers took out a fifteen day rally from Kaithal to Delhi via Jind, Rohtak, Jhajjar, and Gurgaon, from 15th to 31st January 2014, but it mostly included workers and their family members.

The Maruti workers also tried to broaden the content of the struggle by extending support to the struggling farmers in Mehsana, Gujarat where 52,000 acres of land around Hansalpur village were set to be acquired by Suzuki Corporation to set up a new plant primarily for export-oriented purposes. The workers from the three Suzuki plants of Maruti Suzuki, Suzuki Powertrain, and Suzuki Motorcycles brought out a joint *parcha* (leaflet) and went as a delegation to stress "the continuity of our struggles against Maruti Suzuki from Manesar to Mehsana." The cheap rates at which peasants in Manesar doled out their lands to the corporation at the hope of local employment and development

had left them high and dry, the flier said. This would be "the fate of [the] dance of destruction [and] of penetration of capital that awaits Mehsana," if it were to choose "the same path of development." The rally of over 5,000 peasants from Mehsana to Gandhinagar was addressed by the terminated workers of Maruti Suzuki and was met with empathy and understanding by the farmers.

The workers also tried to frame the issue as one of violation of basic democratic rights and the rights to organise and protest to get the support of middle-class rights-based individuals, intellectuals, and groups at the programs of 13th July and 18th July 2013, in Delhi and IFFCO Chowk Leisure Valley Park, Gurgaon respectively. Later on, a *jan sunwai* (public meeting) took place at Jantar Mantar on 30th August 2013. Though this rights-based articulation of the struggle drew support from a small section of the progressive middle classes, it did not go far.

Phase III: Taking the Fight Back to the Plant (2014–2016)

The main thrust of the second phase of the struggle was to mobilize resources for court cases and to change public perception of Maruti workers and build class and cross class alliances, broadening the base of the struggle in society. In that effort, under the leadership of PWC of MSWU, the struggling workers were in a sense successful. But a major lacuna of the struggle was that its centre of gravity shifted from Maruti plants or Manesar industrial region. This was a necessary component of the struggle to build effective pressure on Maruti management. In the third phase, the reorganisation of struggle in the Maruti Manesar plant and Manesar industrial area was a major thrust. We see the success of this effort, with the reinstatement of MSWU in the Manesar plant in April, 2014. Also in the Gurgaon plant, the section sympathetic and supportive to the terminated and jailed workers' struggle came to union power. This created a further development of formation of Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (MSMS), a federation of three unions of Maruti Suzuki plants (Gurgaon and Manesar car plants and the Powertrain plant, who the collectively placed a Charter of Demands for negotiation and settlement), the union of Suzuki's motorcycle plant, and the unions of two vendor companies of Maruti Suzuki situated within the premises of Manesar car plant, Bellsonica and FMI Automotive. But both the newly-reinstated MSWU and the

MSMS, in this very phase, increasingly focused more on improving the working conditions and economic demands to safeguard the interests of permanent workers inside the plants. There were many steps taken on the shop floor that the demands of the union reflected from the beginning of the struggle, like better working conditions, reduction in workload etc. But it created tensions with the temporary workers (their flash strike in 2015 after the wage settlement of permanent workers' unions has been discussed in the later part of this section), and the terminated workers (when a wage settlement of three unions of Maruti Suzuki plants was done without achieving anything concrete on the demand of reinstatement of workers terminated in 2012). Yet, the union in this period took initiative in raising funds to support the fees for criminal cases and financial support to the families of jailed worker leaders, included Provisional Working Committee members at gate meetings, and started observing 18th July each year to demand justice for jailed workers and their release.

Reinstatement of MSWU and Formation of Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (MSMS)

After two years without any union functioning in the Maruti Manesar plant, there was a possibility of reorganisation of the union process in the plant in the beginning of 2014. The company management was confident enough to install a puppet union inside the plant, like it did in the Gurgaon plant

after the struggle of 2000-01. But the struggling terminated workers of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant grabbed this opportunity and took efforts to reconnect with workers working inside the plant to intervene in the union election process. They organized numerous closed door meetings with workers working inside the plant and could finalise a panel of candidates against the panel supported by the management. The management misread the feeling of workers working inside the plant and their underlying desire to have their own union back. The panel supported by the struggling terminated workers swept the election with an overwhelming majority. The MSWU was reinstated.

We reproduce here in full the statement of the Provisional Working Committee of MSWU, which was leading the struggle for terminated and jailed workers' issues, after the election results. It reflects the ongoing class dynamic at that time.

Press Release (11/04/2014)

With the gate meeting in front of the Maruti Suzuki main gate in Manesar in the afternoon at 3 PM today, we the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) have reclaimed after two years, what has been rightfully ours. Over 3,000 workers attended the gate meeting which was addressed by the new

MSWU Union body, including President Pawan Kumar and General Secretary Sanjay Kumar, along with the workers and Union body members from Suzuki Powertrain India Employees Union (SPIEU) and Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union (SMIEU). A wave of energy declared that we have ended the regime of fear that was thrust upon us workers by the owners and managers and administrators. With the election and re-formation of our Union on 4th April, today's meeting is an open declaration of our untiring will to fight against exploitation-repression for all workers.

We have won 11 of 12 seats against the management installed puppet panel in the Union elections on 4th April, with a margin of 80% for most members. Comrade Ramniwas of the Provisional Working Committee of MSWU said that "this victory validates our long continuous untiring struggle of more than two years, against the exploitation-repression by the combined might of the company management-state administration-police and all its tentacles." This win comes in the wake of not only our long struggle since 4th June 2011 to establish our Union rights and collective power, but also after the unfazed struggle of terminated and jailed workers since 18th July 2012. Since that date, it has been more than 20 months that 147 workers including our entire Union body continue to be in jail, without any bail, in the most severe travesty of justice in the criminal justice system in India. 546 permanent and over 1,800 contract workers continue to be

terminated from our services even while the legal cases goes on endlessly. The company *maliks* and managers and the *sarkari babus* and *netas* and the entire ruling elite have nakedly united to 'teach workers a lesson' for demanding our just rights and for asserting our collective will. Even the courts have punished us for supposedly 'adversely affecting foreign direct investment'. We only demanded and continue to demand our dignity as workers, our right to form a Union, and the right of contract workers who are worst faced in the situation. In the last two years, we have continued to demand justice and immediate release of all arrested workers and reinstatement of all terminated workers, and a tripartite negotiation to resolve the issue. We only dared to be united to demand this.

For the elections that were due this year, after we formed Maruti Suzuki Workers Union in March 2012 (Registration No. 1923), the management tried all means to coerce us and install its own puppet Union. It engaged in all manners of conspiracy to divide the workers along lines of permanent and contract, along regions, along various plants, and so on. After it terminated the services of over 2,300 workers in July 2012, it hired new workers who were made to toe its line and work in an atmosphere of fear and punishment. They were not allowed to even talk to the terminated workers who were leading the struggle, or even to independent and other trade unions in the area. Recently the management hired 250 new recruits from the Gurgaon plant who they thought would act in their favour,

in order to pitch them against the Manesar workers. It tried to disenfranchise the jailed and terminated workers against what is laid down in our Union Constitution, and the pliant labour department had followed suit. It put the police to its use to pick up any worker who would dare to even distribute a *parcha*. And it propped up candidates for elections who were close to them in one panel and coerced workers to vote for them.

Even against these policies of divide and rule, of repression and threats, we have emerged victorious. With the active support and solidarity of jailed and terminated workers, the struggling workers who stood against the management panel won 11 out of 12 seats. The evening of 4th April was a spirit of recapturing of the factory for workers, as the street in front erupted with celebrations after two years. Workers from inside the plant came with food from the factory canteen for the terminated workers saying that it won't be long before their struggle also is a win and all arrested workers are also released.

An unprecedented solidarity of workers to the cause of struggle of the last 3 years has made this possible. Solidarity of the workers and Union body of Suzuki Powertrain India Employees Union and Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union must especially be mentioned and welcomed, which opens up yet again the possibility of united action by workers in the belt. Union members from nearby Suzuki Powertrain had sent a clear warning to its management against any use of

unfair practices in the elections in Maruti Suzuki, in the event of which they would even go for strike. In today's gate meeting Comrade Anil, President of SPIEU reiterated this unity. Comrade Anil Kumar, president of SMIEU also stressed on strengthening this unity, and making it the unity of workers in the entire industrial belt of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal.

We would like to welcome the new MSWU (figures out of around 1000 votes polled):

President: Pawan Kumar (796 votes); General Secretary: Sanjay Kumar (789 votes); Chief Patron: Manoj Kumar (728 votes); Vice President: Dharmender Kumar; Secretary: Naveen Kumar; Treasurer: Jitender Kumar; Organising Secretary: Amit Chaudhri; Legal Advisor: Saurabh Jain; Executive Committee: Rajendra, Sandip, Sanjeev, Rajkumar

Our struggle has entered a new phase with this victory. It's a validation of our continuing struggle not only for workers at Maruti Suzuki but for all workers here and everywhere who struggle everyday against exploitation-repression for their Union rights and collective power and dignity.

(Ramniwas, Mahabir, Rajpal, Yogesh, Katar)

Provisional Working Committee, Maruti Suzuki Workers Union

Reinstatement of MSWU in Manesar plant.

Members of the MSMS lead a 4 km protest march in Manesar on March 23rd. (Photo by Kiran Sharma)

Impact of Workers' Struggle in the Transformation of the Production Process

The reinstatement of the union brought back collective bargaining on the shop floor again, and achieved some gains building on the previous struggles.

There is a deep connection between the workers' struggle and the new production model, which has shifted away from the older Fordist model in the age of neoliberal globalisation of production. The different location of production units in the chain of value production allows its workforce different degrees of power over the entire chain of production. This, on the other hand, presents before the management the task of controlling their workforce and restricting their disruptive impact at such nodal points of production. In the wake of the workers' struggle in Manesar, the management had to both give way to certain demands by the workers and restructure the organisation process to restrict the influence of the organised permanent workers' unions.

The management initially had to accommodate the demands of the struggling permanent workers to some extent: increasing break time, extending the number of holidays allowed to both permanent and contract workers, reducing the pressure of work and slowing down the assembly line to an extent, providing relieving staff to allow workers to go to the toilet when required, providing pickup and drop-off facilities for all

workers including those from far-off areas, and so on. This was a necessity the management was pushed into at the beginning of 2012 after almost a year of disturbed production and losses. However, this could not continue for too long in the same manner, as was evidenced by the violence in the plant in July 2012 and the changes made by the management in the interval between the July 2012 incident and the reactivation of the union in the plant in 2014.

By the time the union was on its feet again, the management had managed to create a new equilibrium, by introducing far-reaching changes in the whole network of production. Even with the restoration of the collective bargaining capacity of the workers, the management brokered an understanding with the union for maintaining peace and stability in the industry by giving permanent workers a good increase in the first settlement.

The unions formed among companies of the Suzuki group during the previous phase of agitations for registration of unions came together to establish a platform, Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (MSMS) consisting of four unions from Suzuki plants and two unions from vendor companies (Belsonica and FMI, and later Munjal Showa Ltd.). This also augmented their collective bargaining power. As a result most of the earlier benefits won by permanent workers were restored along with an increase in the time given for a single cycle of production (increased to a minute from the earlier 48 second

rate). Every ten workers enjoyed the benefit of one reliever between them to allow them to access the toilet or take a break when required. Certain economic benefits such as consumption loans of various categories and other economic incentives were also introduced and increased with every settlement.

The benefits that were offered to the permanent workers were culled from a greater extraction of profit elsewhere, i.e. the lower rungs in the classification of workers and the wider network of component manufacturers. In the period of non-functioning of the union inside the plant, the management had forcefully changed the categorisation of workers employed. It initiated a new cycle of employment where contractual employees, under the name of 'company casuals,' were introduced into the production process for the fixed, short term of seven months. This section of the workforce was responsible for the greatest and most demanding part of the manufacturing process. These workers laboured under significantly more difficult circumstances than the permanent workforce which had won some benefits through struggle. There was no provision for relievers and the number of workers in different sections were cut down substantially, thereby increasing the workload on existing workers. For example, vehicle inspection — initially requiring a deployment of near-about eighteen staff — was downsized to only eight, whereas another department holding about 130

workmen was reduced to being manned by almost half that number. Batch after batch, these company casual workers formed a standby force of workers familiar with the production process in the company. This provided the management with a massive buffer against any strike action by the already depleted permanent workforce. For all practical purposes, recruitment of permanent workers was suspended.

At the same time, the company also brought changes to its backward production linkages and source of acquiring components and manpower. An agreement to source one lakh engines from Fiat, a merger with other subsidiary companies within the group such as the engine plant, and other such moves sought to make the internal circulation of resources even more streamlined. A new plant was opened in Gujarat, identifying a state government that could be trusted to provide strong administrative support for business-friendly industrial relations. Here, the entire plant relied on only temporary workers for an extended period of time, working on substantially smaller salaries than temporary workers in the Manesar plant.

The management further disciplined the component suppliers, increasing the stakes and penalties for any interruption in supply, and creating adequate backup facilities for contingencies such as strikes among vendor companies. This led to vendor companies becoming ever more intolerant towards any collectivisation in their plants. Some of the work

done previously in the Maruti plant passed on to supplier companies located within the premises of the Maruti plant itself. The workforce was in this manner further distanced and divided up under the ambit of different management and company identities. The earlier strategy of sourcing workers from relatively far away districts in Haryana was extended to the company linking up with ITIs in Gujarat and creating a direct supply chain of fresh recruits from the same.

Innovation played an important role in reorganising the production process in response to the labour-capital conflict witnessed in the area. The use of big data to increase the monitoring and control of the production process, tying up production with cloud technology, and the increasing reliance on the Internet of Things (IoT) gave the management a qualitatively improved central control over the movement of parts and processes across the production network, and within the company. Rapid automation also restricted the scope for workers leveraging their skill and experience to disrupt production as a tool for collective bargaining, even as their unity was fragmented along new lines of division introduced in the recruitment process by the management. All these changes have mounted significant restrictions on the capacity for even permanent workers to bargain with the management beyond a predefined and limited set of possible benefits.

Temporary Workers' Flash Strike in Manesar (September, 2015)

The category of 'temporary workers' (TWs), who constitute the majority of the workforce in the Maruti Manesar plant, was introduced after July 2012. As explained earlier, the events leading up to these were distinguished by the active role of contract workers, the unity between permanent and contract workers and the demand for permanency of contract workers. The Maruti management, after the violent incident of 18 July 2012, terminated all 1,800 contract workers.

Company casuals or later 'temporary workers' (TWs), those with ITI qualification and appointed only for seven months, replaced the terminated workers inside the plant. In 2015, there were around 3,500 TWs compared to only 1,600 permanent workers. The salary of a TW was Rs. 14,000–15,000 per month, whereas the permanent workers used to get Rs. 35,000 or more. The main burden of production fell on TWs, and permanent workers were engaged in less strenuous jobs or as relievers for TWs. After completing seven months, there was a break in employment of five months for TWs. Then, a section of them might be reinstated for another seven month tenure with the same salary, this time designated TW-2. In 2015, Maruti management reinstated around 15% of TW-1 as TW-2. Significantly, there were no future prospects after working as TW-2; there was no "TW-3," nor was there any possibility of a

permanent job.

On 26th September 2015, the wage settlement between Maruti management and unions of three Maruti plants (the car plants in Gurgaon and Manesar, and the engine plant in Manesar) was finalised, according to which the permanent workers, would get a monthly salary increase of Rs. 16,800 spread over next three years. The terms of settlement applied only to the permanent workers, who were former members of the union. The union demanded a salary increase for TWs, but the management refused, stating that they were a separate category which was not the business of the union. Temporary workers were angered by this; in the morning shift on the very next day, at 6 AM on 27 September, around 1,000 temporary workers gathered at the factory gate of the Manesar plant and refused to enter and work inside the plant. They had two demands: a salary hike in parity with permanent workers, and an end to the seven month contract system to ensure job security.

According to the company, when the workers refused to be persuaded by the company management without a salary hike, the local villagers came and tried to 'persuade' them. According to the workers, however, the company management, unsuccessful in convincing the temporary workers, called 'bouncers' (company-hired goons from the local villages) who attacked the workers. As the clash between workers and locals erupted at the company gate, the management called the police. Twelve police vans reached the location, picked up around 100

workers forcibly, and chased away the rest. Also, two ex-employees of Maruti, Khushi Ram and Jitendra, leaders of PWC, MSWU were arrested. FIRs were filed against them for rioting and illegal restraint, along with another 500 'unknown persons.' Many TWs fled to avoid arrests and did not join work even after 27th September. The flash strike forced the management to increase the salary of temporary workers by Rs. 1,500, but Rs. 750 was deducted from the salary of the workers to compensate 'losses' caused by the strike.

This event brought some tendencies into view. One was the increasing distance between the TWs and the permanent workers' union. The TWs did not feel that they were represented by the union and tried to articulate their assertions separately. This was in contrast to 2011–12, when the unity of permanent and contract workers was exemplary and the demands of contract workers, including those for permanency, were part of the settlement negotiation between the union and the management before the 18 July incident, despite the contract workers not being formal members of the union. One reason for this change may be that the TWs were appointed only for seven months, where earlier the contract workers laboured shoulder-to-shoulder with the permanent workers for years, and thus the connection between TWs and permanent workers was much weaker. Another reason was the increasing wage gap between these two segments of workers. Permanent workers, with increased salary and EMI payments, became

more cautious. Thirdly, the burden of production was not shared evenly: the work of permanent workers had become less strenuous and more supervisory in the intervening three years. Fourthly, the repression in the aftermath of the 18th July incident and the termination and arrest of a large number of permanent workers including the union members reduced the strength and militancy of the union. Temporary workers had no experience of struggle; none of them came forward as 'leaders,' and they did not have proper planning. Despite these obstacles, the flash strike reflected their growing anger due to the 'absent future' after the seven month contract, the heavy workload, and the low wages.

The second important tendency was the relations between the villagers and the temporary workers. Most TWs stayed in rented rooms in surrounding villages like Aliyar, Kasan, and Dhana. Aliyar was once a village of around 500 peasant families. After the Maruti plant was set up, the land was lost. Maruti adopted the practice of not employing locals — anyone who lived within a radius of seventy kilometers. Other plants also followed suit. There was, consequently, almost no employment of the village youth in the auto plants. The families of farmers, who had sold their land, built multi-storied buildings with 15–20 small rooms on each floor and rented out these rooms to the workers. It became an ad-hoc workers colony. These rooms were cheap accommodation primarily for those temporary and contract workers who decided not to avail

the company bus to save the transport allowance of Rs. 1,600 in Maruti Manesar in 2015. The rooms barely had windows, were shared by several workers, and each toilet was usually shared between 20–25 workers. There were only a few well-lit spacious rooms, and only permanent workers could afford them.

Maruti initially adopted four villages surrounding its plant under a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project. In 2015, the number of 'adopted' villages became 10. Under this project, the company used to address certain needs of the villagers like drinking water, sanitation, and even the construction of temple walls. This was a way to keep the villagers in confidence. The village *sarpanch* (head) and other village elders used to get special treatment. Each month, there was a meeting between the company management consisting of HR, security, vigilance officials, and the representatives of the ten villages. Initially the meetings used to take place on the company premises. Later, as the number of representatives (from the same ten villages) increased to 50–60, the meetings moved to fancy hotels in Manesar. Many local unemployed youth from these villages worked as part of company vigilance (popularly known as 'bouncers') or contractors. The 'bouncers' and the villagers owning the workers' residential rooms exercised socio-cultural control and surveillance over workers, particularly migrant and temporary workers. There were often prohibitions on workers wearing shorts, speaking

loudly in Bhojpuri, or talking on the phone at night.

In a conversation after the 2015 flash strike of temporary workers, the Aliyar *sarpanch* expressed that he and other village leaders supported the company then and also during 2011–12 labour unrest. He owned a building of around 50 small rooms that he rented to the workers. His family also owned 40 commercial vehicles to supply materials to Maruti and some other companies. He also owned six liquor shops in the nearby worker's colonies. On 27th September, between 5–6 AM, he received a phone call from the vigilance officer of Maruti. He claimed that he rushed to the factory gate with 100 villagers to take the situation 'in control.'

The alienation of the workers in the sphere of production inside the company and their alienation in the sphere of socio-cultural reproduction shaped the nature of subjectivity of the temporary workers. One temporary worker said: "Time hardly passes here... Seven months feel like seven years." The temporary workers lamented their insecure futures, and how they had to search for new jobs after every 5–6 months. Low wages, dismal working conditions, alienation, insecurity, and precariousness constituted their world of work and life; their assertions, meanwhile, were fragile and sporadic. We will find an echo of all these again in the latest phase (Phase V) of struggle of the non-permanent workers and in the formation of Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS) in January 2025.

Phase IV: Struggle Against Life Imprisonment (2017–2022)

In 2017, the courts ruled on the criminal cases filed against the workers. As the final hearing for the criminal cases approached, the struggling workers intensified their campaign for justice and securing the release of all the incarcerated workers. Meetings were held among worker unions of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial belt and campaigns were run for the jailed workers. On 10th March 2017, 31 workers were convicted and 117 were acquitted. Thirteen of the convicted, including all twelve MSWU leaders and Jia Lal, were sentenced to life imprisonment on 17th March, and other convicted workers were sentenced to 5 years of jail. The life imprisonment of worker leaders under the charges of murder, despite insufficient evidence to corroborate that charge and the many loopholes in the narrative provided by the management side, prompted strong reaction and solidarity action not only in Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial area but in different cities and industrial belts in different states across the country and in different countries beyond India. We have documented in detail, later in this section, one such moment of solidarity actions in India and abroad, when a call was given to observe 'Global Solidarity Days' on 4–5th April, 2017.

For the next five years till 2022, the struggle of Maruti workers

focused on the campaign to "Free The Maruti 13." Funds were raised by MSWU, MSMS, and other unions in the belt and across the country to support the families of jailed worker leaders financially and for legal costs. By 2022, all jailed workers could secure bail and come out of jail because of the efforts of struggling Maruti workers. Unfortunately, two of the Maruti 13, Jia Lal and Pawan Dahia, died in the meantime. Jia Lal died of spinal cancer at the age of 35. Pawan died of electrocution.

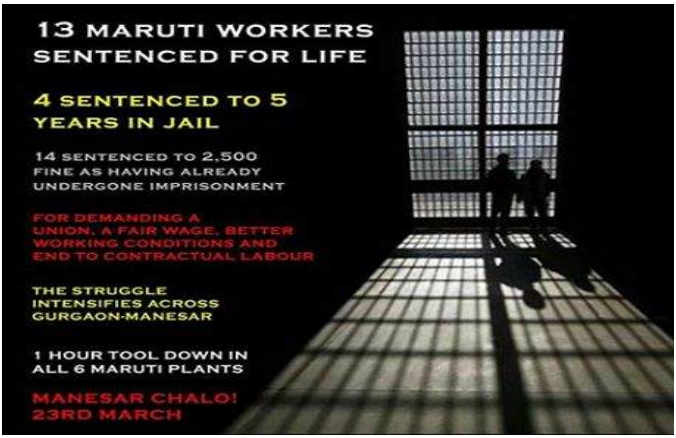
Along with that, the legal struggle continued at the Gurgaon Labour Court and the Chandigarh High Court on labour matters. The struggling Maruti workers themselves handled the cases, for day-to-day court activities, maintenance of case files, preparation of witnesses and coordination among lawyers in different courts. It was a huge task to follow up individual cases of hundreds of workers. The struggling workers put huge efforts to match the legal resources of company management and respond to its delaying tactics. The handling of cases of this scale and complexity, both criminal and labour, by the workers themselves expanded their imagination of what workers can and cannot do.

Court Sentence

Below we tell the story of the days of March–April 2017, when the Maruti workers were convicted and 13 workers were given life imprisonment, and the protests and solidarity actions followed, using lightly edited postings from

marutisuzukiworkersunion.wordpress.com. This also includes

The 13 workers sentenced to life imprisonment in 2017.



Poster for the rally "*Chalo* Manesar!" on 23 March 2017.

the workers' narrative about the lack of sufficient evidence and numerous loopholes behind the conviction for murder. An accidental unfortunate death was used to wage class war against the workers and the capitalist class needed to obtain an exemplary punishment to terrorise and suppress militant workers struggles. Various human rights groups, workers organisations, and progressive formations from across the country and around the world condemned the politically motivated judgement. "Free the Maruti 13" and "Justice for Maruti workers" were rallying calls for unprecedented solidarity actions.

9th March 2017

Dear Comrades,

We are writing an appeal, and updating on the legal case. The Maruti Suzuki workers case ('State of Haryana vs Jiyalal & Others') has been going on since July 2012 through a maze of evidence-less lies and clear pro-corporate anti-worker intent. Since 2012, 216 workers face possible convictions by a pro-corporate system, besides the terminations (and labour cases) of 546 permanent workers and 1,800 contract workers, and a separate case of offences against 111 more workers in Kaithal since 2013.

The date for the Judgment from the Trial Court, the Gurgaon Additional District and Sessions Court, has been set for 10th March 2017. We are apprehensive and have grounds to believe that it will be a politically motivated anti-worker Judgement. The hand-shaking between the Maruti Suzuki company management and the Police, administration, the government and Judiciary could not be more clear as in this case. We are apprehensive about a Pricol-type 'life sentences' and long-term convictions against hundreds of workers and are preparing with a call for unity of all workers and all pro-worker forces. We appeal to you from the Provisional Working Committee, Maruti Suzuki Workers Union to be present in the Gurgaon Sessions Court premises on the day of the Judgement in the case on the 10th of March. We also appeal to you to be united and take solidarity actions in support of Justice for all Maruti Suzuki workers facing repression by the Central and State Government and the Company.

Today, 25,000 workers in several factories (permanent-contract-apprentice as well as *safai karamcharis*) in Gurgaon-Manesar have boycotted lunch today in show of unity and solidarity with the Jailed Maruti Suzuki workers, and warning the organised capitalist class against any anti-worker Judgement tomorrow 10th March by the Gurgaon Court. These include workers of 4 plants of Maruti Suzuki, FMI and Bellsonica among others. Day before, workers in several factories gave warning letters to the managements and

to the Labour and local administration in solidarity with jailed Maruti workers, and notices for lunch boycott, and gate meetings in factories by thousands of workers.

Update on the Legal Case as it Stands during the Final Arguments:

Context: We had 3 strikes in 2011 where we raised voice against the system of exploitation in the factory, and had to face continued management attacks on our Trade Union rights with complicity of the administration. We finally formed our Union — Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, Manesar (Reg. No. 1923) on 1st March 2012. In April, we submitted their Charter of Demands, where the Union said abolition of the contract worker system as one of its central demands, among others. This kind of assertion of our rights against their exploitation was not being taken lightly by the Company management, as it challenged their power and profits. They wanted to attack the Union through their power and conspiracy, which resulted in the incident on 18th July 2012, of a clash inside the plant and the death of an HR manager. Since then, 147 workers have been in Jail without having got bail for more than three-and-a-half years on charges ranging from murder, attempt to murder, rioting, looting, setting fire to private property and various Sections of the IPC. Currently, 11 workers continue to be in jail without bail, which includes the members of the then Union Body. 66 more workers other than the 147 have similar charges under various non-bailable

sections. Along with this criminalisation of labour, 546 permanent and 1,800 contract workers were terminated from their jobs, whose labour cases are also ongoing. 2,500 working class families faced constant repression and penury on top of exploitation of the workers in the factory which created the basis for the management-labour conflict. We have had a movement against this regime of exploitation and repression till today.

The final legal arguments in the Maruti Suzuki workers Trial case concluded on 18th February, 2017 with arguments by Advocates Vrinda Grover, Rebecca John and RS Cheema against the State Prosecution. Find here some facts on the case as it stands in the Courts:

1. It was established during the final arguments that there is no direct evidence linking 'murder' or 'setting fire' to the factory on any worker. No prosecution witness could establish any worker involvement in the same. Neither was any CCTV footage produced by the Prosecution even after Defence asked for the same. The management person Deepak Anand from GM Vigilance who filed the FIR against the 55 Maruti workers named therein, could not identify any worker. The witness Salil Vihari who named the main accused Jiyalal, could not identify him.

2. On 18th July 2012, the incident of conflict happened at 7.20 PM. But Police were called by the Company management

at 11 AM itself, but Police were not allowed inside until the entire incident came to a boil. It has already been said by workers that it was a pre-planned conspiracy on behalf of the management so that a conflict is generated and workers can be implicated on this basis. Bouncers in workers' clothes were also brought inside in the morning itself without IDs.

3. The FIR mentions that 400–500 workers with rods, batons and sticks in hand entered the HR and beat the management but no witness mentions these weapons. Instead all the witnesses uniformly said that workers were carrying shockers and door beams — each doorbeam and shocker weighing over 4 kgs, so around 4,000 kgs of weapons were supposedly recovered. On top of this, Police show that a major section of workers took all these weapons to their respective homes and kept them under their beds and *almirahs*. For another set of workers, Police showed that they caught 20 workers simultaneously sitting under a tree conveniently possessing all these weapons.

4. Also, witnesses had said that each manager was beaten up by 4–5 workers with these weapons with intention of murder. They also stated that no one came to rescue them. But if this was so, then how did they manage to rescue themselves with no serious injury? To this, they said that the workers themselves let them off, which clearly is no intention to murder! The witnesses testified that all of them uniformly stopped the attacks with their left hand. In the MLC done on management

injuries show absurdities as a dental root canal as injury!

5. It has been established how 89 of the 147 workers have been arrested on the basis of names given alphabetically by 4 contractors.[2] None of these workers were identified. Court documents show witness Virendra alias Rajender Yadav has named 25 workers such that all workers' names fall in the alphabetical range of A-G. Another witness, contractor Yaad Ram, testified that he saw 25 workers rioting, all of whose names fall in the next range G-P. Witness Ashok Rana names 26 workers who were allegedly rioting whose names range from P-S. The final witness Rakesh of Tirupati Associates who supplied 900 contract workers to MSIL testified to allegedly seeing 13 workers whose names, continuing the alphabetic sequence, are in the range S-Y.

6. The lists of workers arrested thus was provided by the Company to the Police, and not on the basis of its own investigation, pointing to an active collusion between the two.

7. On 'setting fire to the factory': There was no evidence whatsoever as to setting fire and no witness could explain how the fire was lit and who did it. First, there were contradictory statements as to where the fire was lit – in the conference (M1) room on the first floor, or outside it, or on the ground floor. Awanish Dev's dead body was recovered from the M1 room, and the witnesses claimed that the room was lit on fire from inside where fighting was taking place, but while testifying they

argued that the room caught fire from the outside.

Fire lit and burnt everything down but the match box (a new one) was conveniently unharmed and lying there to be discovered. This recovery of the match box itself was not immediate. At the place of the incident, when the security on-watch, Om Prakash, went on 19th July 2012 in the morning at 6 AM, to the M1 store with a photographer nothing was recovered. Then on that very day at 12 PM FSL authority D. Sonu searched and recovered a new match box and a door frame, and where the room was entirely burnt there was no sign of the matches itself being lit. He neither signed the recovery report nor did he testify in court on the recovered matches and door beam.

On the setting of fire inside the M1 room, of the 16 witnesses that had stated that the room was lit on fire, and 3 witnesses took names of those who did it. None of these witnesses could identify any worker or wrongly identified.

8. According to the postmortem report, Awanish Dev's death was due to asphyxiation. The injury he had is below the knee on the right leg, which cannot lead to death which proves that neither is there a murder case possible against the workers nor is their intention to murder in this case. So Sections 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) clearly do not hold. At max, only 2 people can cause such an injury, while 216 workers have been accused of murder and attempt to murder.

Thus even though this is, on the face of it, pertaining to the case on 18th July 2012 where a general manager of the company Awanish Kumar Dev died in the conflict that erupted that day after a Dalit worker Jiyalal was suspended from duty unilaterally when a supervisor attacked him and gave casteist abuse. But as is evident by now, it was a conspiracy from the management against the assertion of workers for our Trade Union rights.

Even so, the considerations of the Judiciary are suspect as is evident from one of the High Court orders in May 2013 rejecting bail said "this is one one of the unfortunate incidents that has lowered the reputation of India in the world. Foreign direct investment is likely not to happen due to fear of growing labour unrest." The State has already spent crores of public money all these years against the workers. As per RTI, the government paid Advocate KTS Tulsi R. 5.5 crore in just 2 years — Rs. 11 lakh per appearance — just in the Gurgaon Additional District and Sessions Court, Mr Tulsi's three assistants Rs. 66,000 for each appearance and "clerkage" of over Rs. 1 lakh for his expenses each appearance.[3] If this was not enough, instead of the Public Prosecutor from the State, Private Prosecutor from the Company, Vikas Pahwa again kept the 'last word' on their behalf in the Sessions Court Gurgaon during the final arguments.

Will there be Justice for Maruti Workers?

The 147 workers who have spent over four years in Jail, and 11 who continue to be jailed without bail since July 2012, the total implicated 216, the 2,500 families, those who have lost their family members in that course of time or not been able to see their children grow up for those years or have not been able to part of the joys and sorrows of their family for that time – will there be justice?

In this industrial belt, workers struggle have happened from Rico Gurgaon (2009) to Shriram Pistons Bhiwadi (2014) to Honda Tapukhera (2016) and countless others against regime of exploitation on workers by the profit-hungry MNCs Management. In all these cases, to control the simmering tension, there have been outright repression through terminations, violence, murders, *lathi*-charges, false criminal cases and prison terms by the Police-administration-government and local goons on the company's payrolls. In current workers struggles, while the management says, "we will make Maruti-like situation for you" (repress you like the Maruti workers), the workers also say right back, "This can turn into a Maruti-like situation" (Workers will wage a collective movement relentlessly against exploitation-repression). We say this will be a 'political judgement' since this judgement becomes a measure and signal of which version of 'Maruti-like situation' stands.

On 1st March 2017, we marked 6 years of the formation of our Union with a gate meeting in front of the factory in Manesar,

where thousands of workers and Unions participated.[4] After this, the company has moved a stay order against 10 terminated workers in the leadership of the Provisional Working Committee, MSWU to stay 2 kms away from the company gate. On 7th March, various Unions met in Gurgaon and resolved to hold factory gate meetings and give warning letters to their managements in solidarity with jailed workers which happened on 8th March. There is lunch and dinner Boycott in various factories on 9th March. Hundreds of workers will gather in the Court premises at 10 AM and in the afternoon on 10th March.

We appeal to you to be united and resist this onslaught by capitalists and the government, and stand with the workers class movement in this crucial and decisive situation. We appeal to you from the Provisional Working Committee, Maruti Suzuki Workers Union to be present in the Gurgaon Sessions Court premises on the day of the Judgement in the case on the 10th of March. We also appeal to you to take solidarity actions in support of Justice for all Maruti Suzuki workers facing repression by the Central and State Government and the Company.

Provisional Working Committee,
Maruti Suzuki Workers Union

17th March 2017

On 17th March, the Gurgaon Sessions Court declared the sentences for the 31 workers convicted on 10th March by the Court with an anti-worker pro-corporate order. Expressing working class solidarity against satisfying the collective conscience of the capitalist class, on 16th March, more than 1 lakh workers boycotted lunch and dinner in nearly 50 plants in Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal-Neemrana industrial belt and beyond.

On 16th March, protest demonstrations also took place in solidarity with Maruti Suzuki workers by various mass democratic, students, human rights, and workers organisations, and Trade Unions in front of Haryana Bhawan/Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, in Rudrapur and Kashipur in Uttarakhand, in Ludhiana in Punjab, in Chennai and Coimbatore in Tamilnadu, in Kaithal in Haryana, in Bengaluru in Karnataka, in Bhilai in Chattisgarh.

A partial list of the factories plants taking part in solidarity action on 16th March in support of Maruti workers is:

1. Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, Manesar
2. Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union, Gurgaon
3. Maruti Suzuki Powertrain India Employees Union, Manesar
4. Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union, Khedki

Daula

5. Honda Motorcycle and Scooters Employees Union, Manesar
6. Hero MotoCorp Employees Union, Gurgaon
7. Hero MotoCorp Employees Union, Dharuhera
8. Daikin Air-Conditioning Employees Union, Neemrana
9. Bellsonica Auto Components Employees Union, Manesar
10. Kansai Nerolac Paints Karmchari Union, Bawal
11. Rico Auto Workers Union, Dharuhera
12. Omax Auto Employees Union, Dharuhera
13. Bajaj Motors Employees Union, Narsinghpur
14. Sunbeam Workers Union, Gurgaon
15. Munjal Kiriu Employees Union, Manesar
16. Sona Koyo Steering Workers Union, Manesar
17. Microtech Union, Bawal
18. Ahresty Union, Bawal,
19. Pricol Union, Manesar
20. Hema Union, Gurgaon
21. Napino Union, Manesar
22. Satyam Auto Union, Manesar
23. GKN Union, Dharuhera
24. Metro Ortem Union, Gurgaon
25. FCC Union, Manesar
26. Munjal Showa Union, Gurgaon
27. Munjal Showa Union, Manesar

28. Talbros Union, Manesar
29. Perfetti Union, Manesar
30. Frigoglass Union, Manesar
31. Organica Medical, Manesar
32. ENKY Union, Manesar
33. Uniproduct Union, Bawal
34. Autofit Union, Dharuhera
35. Endurance Union, Manesar
36. Asti Union, Manesar
37. MK Auto Union, Gurgaon
38. Harsoriya Union, Bawal
39. Amul Union, Manesar
40. Moser Baer Union, Noida
41. LG Union, Noida
42. Shanthi Gear Union, Coimbatore
43. Onload Gear, Coimbatore

19th March 2017

13 of our brothers have been given 'life sentences' – including 12 Maruti Suzuki Workers Union body members – on the baseless charge of 'murder' on 18th March afternoon by the Gurgaon Additional Sessions Court. 4 workers given 5 year sentences. 14 workers were given 3 years, but have already spent 4 years in prison, so they were released. Of the earlier acquitted 117 workers who spent over 4 years in Jail, we do not yet know

as to who will return the lost years. 148 already spent 4 years in Jail without bail since 2012 without bail and 2,500 workers were earlier illegally terminated and then faced continual State repression.

We reject the falsehood that this is an 'objective judgement.' The Prosecution Case and Judicial Sentence is based on no evidence, false-witnesses and pure class hatred. See here for details of the arguments. Workers had no involvement in the unfortunate death of the pro-worker manager who helped in registering the Union, Mr Avanish Kumar Dev – this is conclusively proved in the legal case from the Defence. The conflict on the day of 18th July 2012 started with a supervisor attacking a Dalit worker Jiyalal — who was later made into 'prime accused' in the case — with caste-based abuse, and the worker's suspension. The entire case is part of management conspiracy to finish off the Union, an attack on the Right to Union Formation itself, and the demands — particularly of abolition of the Contract Worker System — it was raising and became a symbol for workers' struggle.

The nature of the legal case was informed from the outset by the vitriolic repressive manner in which thousands of workers were continually hounded after 18th July 2012 by the nexus of the management and government, including the Police, administration and labour departments. This Judgement – made in between turning Gurgaon and Manesar into Police camps – is directly anti-worker and heavily influenced by the

interests of the Company management, to 'set an example', to sow fear and terror among all industrial workers in the country, particularly the belt of Gurgaon to Neemrana in Haryana and Rajasthan. The Prosecution in its final arguments – much similar to the Chandigarh HC order of May 2013 rejecting bail for workers – arguing for 'death penalty' for workers, talked of the need of restoring 'confidence' of capital, and the Prime Minister's initiative of inviting global investors for 'Make in India'. The confidence of these foreign and national capitalists depend on one thing: a cheap and compliant labour force, so no Unions or any raising of demands.

By specifically targeting the entire Union body, this Company Raj wants to tell us that the workers movement, the Right to Union Formation and other Trade Union rights as well as Human Rights of workers in the country will be simply (with illegal and legal means) crushed by capitalists and the State. The attack on our Union body members is been simply because they have been the leadership of the struggle against the management practices of exploitation of labour in the factory and waged a legitimate long struggle for trade union rights and dignity since 2011 with the unity of permanent and contract workers, demanding the abolition of the contract worker system, dignity in the workplace, and an end to exploitative practices by the management. And finally registered our Union on 1st March 2012. This workers assertion was not acceptable to the management and they

wanted to crush our Union, especially after submission of the Charter of Demands in April 2012 which argued for abolition of the contract worker system. So they conspired and escalated the conflict on 18th July 2012.

The struggle full of vitality and hope gave positive energies for other workers to fight similar exploitation in the industrial region and beyond from Honda to Rico to Asti to Shriram Pistons to Daikin AC to Bellsonica, to name a few. This collective workers assertion needed to be crushed and 'taught a lesson' in the interests of the company managements. Similar conflicts and cases of repression on workers movements have happened from Graziano Transmissions Noida, Regent Ceramics Puducherry, Pricol in Chennai and so on. This Judgement comes in the trail of these repression, increasing its tempo. And so, the industrial areas are being turned into Police Camps.

Maruti Suzuki CEO RC Bhargava has said this is a 'class war.' And what the government dutifully is doing is to turn workers disputes with management into a 'Law & Order problem', to criminalize workers fighting for their Rights of Union formation and against the Contract System. We condemn this criminalisation of workers.

We are not afraid, nor tired with so much continuous repression. It is only by increasing the tempo of the unity of workers beyond the divisions of permanent and contract, and

independent class assertion against the continuous attacks of the current Company-State regime of exploitation-repression, that we can take the struggle forward. Lakhs of workers in industrial areas are already doing solidarity actions since 9 March, and on 16th March, over a lakh workers in Haryana, Rajasthan, UP, Tamil Nadu did hunger strikes. On 18th immediately after the Judgement, 30,000 workers in 5 Maruti Suzuki factories did an hour of 'tool down' solidarity strike even though the management tried to crush it as always by pressure to work and notice of 8 days pay cut. Since 16th March, there have been protests by various workers, students, human rights and other democratic organisations in over 20 cities, and deputations and solidarity positions and actions in 21 countries.

On 23rd March — the day of martyrdom of Shaheed Bhagat Singh — the Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (MSMS), the joint platform of all 6 Maruti Suzuki factories have given the call of 'Chalo Manesar,' for thousands of workers to gather and do a Protest rally in Manesar. We call upon all pro-worker forces to participate in this Protest. We also feel the need for a National Day of Protest, tentatively on 4th April. In this decisive and crucial hour, we appeal to all workers and pro-worker forces to stand with the demand to free the convicted workers, and wage a protracted struggle to ensure justice and workers rights, and show solidarity in whatever ways possible.

23rd March ko Chalo Manesar!

Free the Maruti Workers!

End the Regime of Exploitation-Repression in the Industrial belts.

Provisional Working Committee,
Maruti Suzuki Workers Union

Solidarity Actions

A call was then put out, on 29th March, for an international day of solidarity and all-India protest day on 4th and 5th April 2017.

There were protests around the world, organised by trade unions and people's organisations, attended by workers, students and civil society. Solidarity actions took place in India, USA, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, Brazil, France, and other countries. Solidarity messages came from International Automotive Workers Coordination, International Union Network of Solidarity and Struggle, ICOR, IndustriAll, CGT, KCTU, Zenroren, All Pakistan Trade Union Federation, General Motors and BMW from Germany and so on. Here, we

document some of these events and statements.

India

In India, there were protests in over 30 cities in 15 states as follows:

Gurgaon, Haryana

Neemrana, Rajasthan

Faridabad, Haryana

Kaithal, Haryana

Kolkata, West Bengal

Patna, Bihar

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Rudrapur, Uttarakhand

Mumbai, Maharashtra

Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu

Pondicherry

Ludhiana, Punjab

Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Mayapuri, Delhi

Okhla, Delhi

Bhiwani, Haryana

USA

San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO held a demonstration in solidarity. They even had a Maruti worker address them over the telephone. The Executive Committee passed a resolution, highlighting the true motivations behind the convictions and the unbendable resolve of the workers. An excerpt:

> Whereas, the International Commission on Labor Rights (ICLR) and other recognized international labor rights organisations have reported that the company and the prosecutor were not able to provide any evidence to prove that the convicted unionists were responsible for the death of the personnel manager; in fact the main argument presented by the prosecutor was that the unionists needed to be punished harshly (the prosecution was asking for the death penalty) so that investors confidence in India and in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' policy could be restored. [...]
>
> Whereas, the government of Narendra Modi, a close ally of Donald Trump, has been actively criminalizing union organizing in the new industrial belts of Northern India in an attempt to woo foreign investment to India,
>
> Whereas, the Indian workers have not been intimidated

by the company and government threats: On March 18, more than 30,000 workers in five Suzuki-Maruti plants went on strike for one hour immediately after the sentencing, and before that 100,000 workers of the region boycotted lunch and dinner.

A rally was also held in front of the Indian consulate in New York City.

France

Local unions in Dreux, France held a joint press conference in support of jailed workers.

And solidarity protests were also held in Paris.

The General Confederation of Labour, France (CGT), along with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU, South Korea), the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), and the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren, Japan) issued a joint statement in support of the workers. Here is an excerpt.

> Last month's judgement has come after a four-and-a-half year trial and is devoid of any material evidence. The judgement accepts that the criminal investigation carried out by the local police was poor and inadequate. The judgement merely reiterates the version of the Maruti-Suzuki management.
>
> This judgement undermines democratic rights and the

rule of law in India. The judgement amounts to an attack on trade union rights and freedoms in India.

We join our forces on 4th and 5th April 2017, through actions at our workplaces, the factories and offices of Suzuki and at offices of India's government and its embassies and consulates, in solidarity with the 13 convicted comrades and all workers of Maruti-Suzuki and members of Maruti-Suzuki Workers' Union through a worldwide protest demanding that:

- The Government of the State of Haryana withdraw its prosecution in the Maruti-Suzuki case immediately and ensure the immediate release of the 13 workers,

- Maruti-Suzuki India Limited reinstate all 2300 workers dismissed in July-August 2012 and

- The Government of India ensure the protection of trade union and democratic rights under Indian law and international covenants.

The Independent Democratic Workers' Party (POID) called for a demonstration at the Indian embassy in Paris, saying

Without delay, the POID calls on its activists to stand ready to gather at the Indian Embassy on the evening

of April 4th. When trade unions are affected, democracy is at stake. The entire labour movement is in question. The POID is addressing all parties claiming to be from the workers' movement and democracy for a meeting, in order to build together a unitary response to demand the liberation of the 13.

Germany

Following a call by International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties (ICOR) and organisations, auto workers in Gelsenkirchen, Germany marched in solidarity with the jailed workers and distributed pamphlets to the public.

This action was organised by International Automotive Workers Coordination, with representatives in Spain and Brazil along with Germany. They sent a message which included:

Since years the struggle of the Automobile Workers of

Maruti-Suzuki in Manesar/Indien [sic] is a symbol of successful fight for organizing of unions and the unity of permanent and contract workers. A broad solidarity movement of the workers and the masses in Gurgaon is opposing the scandalous and long-term detainment of 148 strike leaders. Over years, again and again, there were mass rallies and strikes against the imprisonment and class justice serving the Maruti Suzuki Company. The verdict of March 18th, 2017, with life sentences for 13 strike activists and leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union plus other workers with long year sentences is intended to break this resoluteness.

[...]

International Automotive Workers Coordination calls for:

Organize activities of solidarity and solidarity strikes in the locations of all automobile companies!

Conduct activities of protest at the Indian Embassies and/or Suzuki places of business!

Freedom for the workers of Maruti! One class - one antagonist – one struggle!

Collect donations to support the families of the

imprisoned workers!

International Days of Protest on April 4th and April 5th: Free the Maruti Workers!

19 factory workers in Daimler, Germany sent a message:

Solidarity with the automotive workers of Suzuki-Maruti in India!

We, colleagues of Daimler in Mettingen near Stuttgart, firmly protest against the scandalous judgment against our colleagues of Suzuki-Maruti in India.

We demand their immediate release!

We stand up for the international unity of workers and their support for each other!

For a society without exploitation and oppression. Together we are strong.

From Eisenach:

Dear fellow-workers,

on behalf of the regular monday-rally in Eisenach, Germany and on behalf of the militant workers of Opel (General Motors) in Eisenach we express our

solidarity with your struggle against the unjust judgement against the workers of Maruti-Suzuki. We continue to inform workers and the public about your struggle and will strengthen international solidarity!

Fritz Hofmann

Hungary

There was a solidarity protest in Budapest on 4th April.

UK

A petition with more than 150 signatures from British and Irish trade unionists was delivered to the Indian embassy in

London on 4th April 2017. John Sweeney, a spokesperson for the group said

> This is a complete miscarriage of justice based upon the fallibility of eyewitness evidence, police corruption and a Government determined to deny Workers their right to organise independent trade Unions.

Sri Lanka

The Free Trade Zones Workers in Sri Lanka also held a protest meeting on 4th April.

Spain

Nationalist Workers' Committees (LAB) from Basque

Country, Spain, sent a solidarity statement.

> Freedom for all imprisoned Maruti-Suzuki-Workers!
>
> Solidarity message from the Basque Country
>
> LAB, Basque trade union from the Basque Country, wants to send a solidarity message to all imprisoned Maruti-Suzuki-Workers, and to all people in a struggle against the injustice of the arrest of these 13 trade unionists, in the International Days of Protest on 4th and 5th of April.

Brazil

Apart from the International Automotive Workers' Coordination above, International Union Network of Solidarity and Struggle also sent a solidarity message:

> Release the 13 prisoners of Maruti Suzuki! Total support to unionists sentenced to life imprisonment in India
>
> The International Union Network of Solidarity and Struggle expresses its support for the 13 prisoners of Maruti, charged and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Indian courts.
>
> They were all activists and leaders of numerous

workers' mobilizations that resulted in the founding of the Maruti-Suzuki Workers' Union at the main Indian car factory in Manesar (Haryana).

The reaction of the Maruti-Suzuki employers is based on false accusations about a fire that occurred at the plant on July 18th, 2012. In addition to firing 2,300 workers, 13 leaders were brought to trial and found guilty.

- The attack on one is an attack on all!
- Against the criminalisation of trade union struggles!
- For the reinstatement of all 2,300 workers!
- Undo the accusations!
- Release the 13 prisoners of Maruti now!

Phase V: The Struggle Reignites (2023–2025)

By 2022, all the jailed workers were out on bail. The terminated workers of Maruti Suzuki took a fresh initiative to strengthen the ground struggle for justice against their baseless termination in 2012 and to raise their demands for reinstatement of 546 regular and 1,800 contract workers. Hundreds of individual labour cases of the terminated Maruti workers filed in Gurgaon labour court are still pending, each being processed at snail's pace. Workers realise that these cases might take another decade to get settled. Even a win in the Gurgaon labour court can be challenged in the High Court and then the Supreme Court by Maruti Suzuki. As an earlier example, it took more than fifteen years to get judgement for the 24 workers dismissed by the company management after the workers strike in 1999–2000 in the Maruti Gurgaon plant. Even when they won the cases, the court didn't order their reinstatement, arguing that the production process had changed too much to accommodate the now-aged workers! They were offered a paltry compensation. In the case of the Maruti Manesar workers, the number of cases and witnesses involved is far greater. In light of such experience, the workers, after the criminal matter was partially resolved with the jailed workers out on bail, decided not to depend solely on a legal course of action but instead to also collectively intensify the grassroots struggle in Gurgaon-Manesar.

The terminated workers began organising general body meetings in different districts of Haryana and reconnected with workers in other states. It was decided that to reorganise the struggle, a committee based in Gurgaon was needed to spearhead it. A five-member 'Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee' was formed by the end of 2022 in Gurgaon, which established contacts with a large number of permanent workers inside the plants of Maruti Suzuki, along with current union members of different Maruti Suzuki plants. The Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh (MSMS), a federation of different plant unions of Maruti Suzuki and some vendor company unions, agreed to take up the demand of reinstatement of terminated Maruti Manesar workers and called for a rally from Rajiv Chowk, Gurgaon to the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office in Gurgaon, and a day-long *dharna* at the DC office on 15th February 2023 demanding reinstatement of the terminated workers. Around 200 terminated workers from different parts Haryana and other states joined the *dharna*, along with union representatives and members of different plant level unions. This was a reignition of the struggle of Maruti Manesar workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt. Thereafter, general body meetings of the terminated workers and periodic demonstrations at the DC office in Gurgaon took place over the next year, foregrounding the demands of terminated workers, including the yearly demonstration commemorating 18th July incident by MSMS.

By late 2024, the workers realized that a more militant and sustained form of struggle was needed to pressurise the Maruti Suzuki management to come to the negotiation table and agree to the demands of terminated workers. From the general body of terminated workers, a proposal to initiate an indefinite sit-in demonstration at the factory gate of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant was discussed. Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee along with MSMS convened a 'Maruti Mazdoor *Nyay* (Justice) Convention' on 22nd August 2022 in a *dharamshala* in Gurgaon and invited various unions and organisations to discuss strategies to advance their struggle for justice.

During the convention, the terminated workers placed their proposal to start an indefinite *dharna* at the Maruti Manesar factory gate. The MSMS leadership, however, did not agree with this proposal. At that time, negotiations between the Maruti management and the MSMS were going on for the three-yearly settlement on the Charter of Demands placed by MSMS. Concerned that this sit-in would affect negotiations, the MSMS did not agree to heighten the conflict and told the committee of terminated workers to wait as MSMS discussed their demands with the management. The terminated workers were, however, convinced that without a more militant form of struggle, the Maruti management wasn't going to listen to their demands. Further, with the Haryana election approaching, the timing was favourable to put pressure on the incumbent

government. After the convention, the Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee went ahead with the decision to enter Manesar after almost a decade and start an indefinite dharna.

Six-Month Long Sit-In at Manesar Tehsil (18 September 2024 – 29 January 2025)

The terminated Maruti workers, led by the Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee, announced that they would enter Manesar and reach Gate Number 2 of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant on 18th September 2024. In response, the management went to court to get an order to stop the program before 18th September. The Civil Court of Gurgaon restricted the demonstration of workers to 500 meters from the factory gate. The workers took out a rally and entered Manesar, marching towards the factory gate. A large police force stopped them at Manesar *tehsil* near the Honda plant in the industrial area, seven kilometers from the Maruti plant, and the workers were denied any demonstration or *dharna*. Despite pressure from the police and administration, the workers were determined to not go back and were prepared for dire consequences. Ultimately, the police and the administration gave in to avoid any major confrontations before the upcoming elections. Workers started their indefinite sit-in demonstration at Manesar *tehsil*. This *dharna* became a centre of renewed struggle and broke the undeclared restriction on workers *dharna* at Manesar for years.

The protesting workers started distributing pamphlets among workers in the entire industrial region, including Maruti plants, to build larger class solidarity. They started bringing their family members and relatives to the *dharna* site to integrate them with the struggle. An entire set up of tents and a kitchen was established for a protracted struggle, which required the workers to withstand the chilling cold of winter nights. A new collectivity developed through living and struggling together. Demonstrations and mobilisation programs were organized on 30th September 2024, 18th October 2024, 13th November 2024, and 18th December 2024 at the protest site inviting unions, workers organisations, progressive and democratic-rights activists, family members, and villagers. A "Black Diwali" was organized at the protest site on 1st November 2024. Despite occasional police harassment while distributing pamphlets, the *dharna* established itself as a centre of protest for the thousands of workers of the industrial belt who passed it while going to their factories.

Founding the Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS)

The Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee raised the demands of non-permanent workers of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant as well. They took the initiative to prepare a Charter of Demands, received signatures of 525 non-permanent workers and

Dharna and demonstrations by Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee in Manesar.

Posters at the *dharna* by workers at Manesar *tehsil*.

Poster for the demonstration by MSAMS.

Non-permanent workers demonstration on 10th January at the DC office.

Haryana Police detains the workers on 31st January from court.

Poster for the Kharkhoda *Chalo* Rally.

submitted it to the labour department on 18th November 2024. The company management started pressuring the non-permanent workers, threatening to fire them. But the pressure did not apply to those *lakhs* of workers who had already completed their work in the plant and had no stable employment thereafter. These workers became the backbone of the new struggle by non-permanent workers in this phase. We have used materials from the booklet published by Masuti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS) to describe the struggle of non-permanent workers.

It was decided to contact those workers as well and convene a meeting to build a platform and raise their demands. A meeting of workers was called on 5th January 2025. Calls started pouring in by the dozen every minute for several days before the meeting that Sunday. The word had spread fast and now there was worry about where everyone would fit if all those who were called would come.

Finally, the committee managed to rent a marriage garden one day before the meeting. There were already nearly a hundred people at its door before daybreak. An hour before the allotted time, the crowd had swelled to over a thousand. By the time the meeting started, more than 3,000 workers were queuing up to give their details. The meeting had been called to discuss various demands for non-permanent workers of the company, including the demand for permanent recruitment for all the

workers who had previously worked there under various non-permanent categories.

Workers had travelled from across the Delhi-NCR industrial belt, some even from their villages back in Bihar, UP and Orissa, and others from the Maruti plant in Mehsana, Gujarat. Poignant stories: of young workers who had given the best years of their lives to the company and were now wandering the belt in search of employment; memories of being turned back from the factory gate having been discovered as an erstwhile temporary worker on applying again to the company in a different category; tragic tales of never receiving the final offer letter even after clearing multiple interviews and medical examinations in the Company Trainee recruitment process, that too after having already worked in the company for over three terms.

And thus, the Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS) was formed, to take up these issues and fight on behalf of all non-permanent workers, past and present, of Maruti.

A New Tendency in Workers' Struggle

The first task taken up by the MSAMS was a campaign to gather further signatures on the Charter of Demands and submit it to the labour department with a mass gathering of workers on 10th January 2025. In the meantime, workers who

had come from far and others arriving for the agitation camped at the protest site of terminated Maruti Workers at the Manesar *tehsil* near IMT Manesar Chowk, seven kilometers from the company gate.

Within five days, a massive gathering of over 5,000 workers converged in front of the Gurgaon Labour Department. The charter of demands had already been submitted to the company management on 9th January 2025. The labour department scheduled a tripartite meeting with the company management and the MSAMS on 31st January 2025. The demonstration also submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Haryana and declared a massive mobilisation and workers' march in IMT Manesar on 30th January. Most importantly, a twelve-member working committee of non-permanent workers from different states and representatives from among the Maruti terminated workers was constituted at the meeting to lead the agitation and represent the workers in the negotiation at the labour department.

In the twenty days in between, a group of about fifteen volunteers stayed in Gurgaon and worked day and night to contact more workers, inform them about the program on 30th January and organise them into groups for better communication. Several of the workers currently working in Gurgaon would finish their shifts and come to help; others took the responsibility of making calls from wherever they were

located. Pamphlets were distributed across the Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial belt. The Hero MotoCorp Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh, a platform inspired by and similar to the MSAMS formed by workers of the Hero MotoCorp plant in Neemrana, also issued a *parcha* and called on all non-permanent workers at Hero MotoCorp to join the demonstration. The committee estimated that around 7,000 workers would be coming to the demonstration, and some even hoped for 10,000.

Meanwhile, the company had filed a second application in the Gurgaon Civil Court asking for an injunction on workers protesting anywhere in a two kilometer radius around the company plants in both Manesar and Gurgaon. On 28th January, workers appeared before the court, arguing for their right to peaceful protest, highlighting the illegality of the company's labour policies. The court only pronounced its order late afternoon the next day, refusing the company's prayer and permitting peaceful protest anywhere more than 500 meters away from the company's boundary wall.

State Repression

On 29th January, within thirty minutes of the court order being released, a huge battalion of police officers descended on the protest site of the terminated Maruti workers at Manesar Tehsil, where workers had been sitting in a peaceful demonstration for close to four months. The police uprooted

the encampment, confiscating bags, banners, pamphlets and posters for the program slated to happen the next day. Around a hundred workers were detained and released more than 45 kilometers away from Manesar.

On 30th January, the day of the demonstration, hundreds of policemen remained stationed at IMT Chowk, picking up workers pouring in from across the belt. Workers were chased away and scattered across Manesar. The sole and clear purpose of the administration was to ensure that the workers could not gather *en masse*, hoping to prevent a gathering that would comfortably have been bigger than the one on 10th January, and thereby making it impossible for the world to see the scale of the protest. By the evening, 76 workers had been detained, while others were forcibly taken away from the protest site in police buses. Nevertheless, the workers returned once again and spent the night at various locations across Gurgaon and Manesar, showing their unwavering commitment to the movement.

On 31st January, the administration continued to hound the protesting workers for the third consecutive day. Still recovering from the chaos unleashed the previous day, hundreds of workers gathered at the DC office in the morning for the tripartite meeting called to discuss the Charter of Demands submitted to the Labor Department on 10th January. However, the police would not even allow the workers to access the court complex and the labour department where

they were party to a dispute and had been called by the Assistant Labour Commissioner (ALC) for conciliation proceedings.

The police informed the workers that Section 144 had been imposed in Gurgaon and began forcibly removing and dispersing them from the DC office gate with a heavy police presence. Workers regrouped in a park within the court complex, but the police continued to hound them there. They then moved to Kamla Nehru Park in Gurgaon, but police forces arrived there as well and forced workers to vacate the ground. This cycle of dispersal and regrouping continued at various locations across Gurgaon throughout the day.

Around 100 workers were taken to the Manesar Police Line station from the DC office, but the total number of detainees remains unclear. A couple of union committee members were detained and sent to the Rajendra Park police station where the company had filed a criminal complaint against them for 'misguiding workers and promising them jobs.' Out of the 13 committee members, only one could make his way to the venue of the tripartite meeting, as all others were either arrested, detained, or driven away. Due to the ongoing police crackdown, continuing the meeting became impossible and it was postponed.

Despite the three days of intense police action in Manesar and Gurgaon, Maruti Suzuki's temporary workers displayed

extraordinary courage and determination, refusing to retreat. More than a hundred non-permanent workers stayed in different *dharamshalas* in Gurgaon, organized by MSAMS, until police forced them to move out. Forced dispersal citing Section 144 became the new 'normal' for any gathering of Maruti workers. Protest actions were taken by various workers organisations in Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand, UP, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan, etc. in solidarity with the Maruti workers and against state repression in the month of February.

Both Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee and MSAMS challenged the illegal use of Section 144 and refusal of right to peaceful assembly at Punjab and Haryana High Court in the beginning of February 2025. Meanwhile MSAMS started a campaign to submit mass letters from workers to the Prime Minister. MSAMS organized a protest demonstration on 19th March 2025 at Jantar Mantar, Delhi and submitted more than 5,000 letters to the Prime Minister's Office at Raisina Hills, New Delhi. On 6th April 2025, MSAMS gave a 'Kharkhoda *Chalo*' call demanding 10,000 permanent jobs for non-permanent Maruti workers at the newly functional Kharkhoda plant of Maruti Suzuki in the Sonipat district of Haryana, which is supposed to be the biggest automobile manufacturing unit in Asia, with production capacity of one million units per annum. A huge police force was deployed to prevent any gathering of Maruti workers at Kharkhoda.

Workers were detained by the police and some workers were beaten up as they reached Kharkhoda. Despite the repression, the struggle still goes on and the workers are trying to mobilize in newer forms.

The combined struggle of the terminated permanent workers, hardened by the experience of a decade-long militant and resilient struggle, and the non-permanent workers, *lakhs* in number and with no hope for the future, marks the latest phase of the struggle of Maruti Suzuki workers. It has opened new possibilities and new tendencies in this uncompromising, militant, and sustained struggle, and it has inspired workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Neemrana industrial belt and beyond. The fact that non-permanent workers can mobilise at such a scale has been a remarkable and unprecedented feat. It unnerved the police, administration, management, and government.

The Indian Government conferred the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian order after the Bharat Ratna, to Osamu Suzuki for his 'contribution' to 'development' in India in 2025. Narendra Modi was to inaugurate the 900-acre Kharkhoda plant of Maruti Suzuki. An entire expressway (Kundli-Manesar-Palwal highway) was developed to connect Manesar with Kharkhoda by the government. In this context, the exposure of the underbelly of 'development' and the peeling back of the façade of 'Skill India' was not tolerable to the ruling class. It now vigorously mobilises its resources to

suppress the struggle. But the destitution is so deep, and the anger so strong, that the collective will of the non-permanent workers cannot be suppressed for very long.

A Conversation

With A Worker Leader

Some members of Class Notes *spoke with one of the worker leaders of the movement. What follows is his story and thoughts.*

The Movement Until now

Early 2000s: Shifts in Power and Control

In the year 1999–2000, when the BJP government came to power, Japanese investment in India increased, including in Maruti. With growing Japanese control, there were whispers about dissolving the workers' union. Some workers were given arrears and quietly removed. Some resisted, they didn't accept the settlement and went to court. Even before this period, the assembly line at Maruti was known for its intense workload.

Manesar Plant: New Beginnings, or So It Seemed

In 2001, Maruti acquired 300 acres in Manesar. In 2005, the new plant became operational with a new, much more mechanised, assembly line, and in 2006, car production began.

The new plant promised better opportunities, but the reality was harsh. Drinking water was unsafe, there were no fans in the

work areas, and the workload was immense. Contract workers received Rs. 5,500 and trainees received Rs. 3,400. However, they were told that after three years, they would become permanent. Hope kept them going. They believe in the management's promise: "We will reap the benefits together."

Work Conditions: Between Hope and Hardship

The conditions were inhumane. In the weld shop, a worker joked that even his underwear had torn due to the intensity of the work. Breathing problems were common in the paint shop.

After completing my ITI, I started my apprenticeship at the Gurgaon Maruti plant. I had no phone, but people in my village saw my placement at such a reputed company as a big success. Everyone assumed my future was secure. Other apprentice workers and I were told about the company's history and promised a permanent job if we worked sincerely.

I shared a small room with a few others, more than five kilometers from the factory. Permanent workers trained us for the first few days, but left us on our own after that. The work required us to be in a bent position for long periods. Water was available near our stations, but if we went to drink some, it would slow the assembly line down, and it would be recorded that we caused the delay. A bathroom break would take even longer, so we avoided drinking water; we usually settled for just moistening our lips.

Physical pain became a part of life. One worker wrapped his arms in hot bandages just to sleep at night. No one spoke of the suffering because of the prestige attached to working at Maruti.

Apprenticeship and Recognition

Our shifts lasted 8 hours and 45 minutes, but we had to report 15 minutes early—making it a 9-hour-plus day in the factory. Along with commuting to and from the plant, this added up to over 10 hours. I never took a day off or arrived late, hoping it would help me become permanent. I even got some gifts from the company for my dedication.

When President Abdul Kalam visited the plant, we received proper uniforms and good food for the first time. Otherwise we never got such good treatment. As apprentices weren't allowed on the main production floor, I was placed at an intermediate station that day. On other days, I (an apprentice) was at such a crucial station that if I made a mistake, it would mean death of those working on the car down the line, and damage to the car itself. And this station is the only work I was ever taught, I wasn't shown how to do anything else.

In my whole time there, we had no formal training or classes. Nevertheless, I passed my apprenticeship.

Understanding the Importance of Unions

Around this time, I met someone who was fired from Maruti years before for attempting to unionise the workers. He told me about the history of the unions and explained that the only way to improve working conditions was to organise, take over the machines and production line and then make demands. Around this time, I saw news on the television about the Honda Manesar plant's union movement, which inspired me.

After this, I worked briefly at Honda as a contract worker and found better food and work conditions — thanks to a functioning union. That left a strong impression on me about the importance of unions.

Return to Maruti: The Fight for Union

Eventually, I joined the Manesar plant, this time in the assembly line. I was tasked with installing the driver's seat — a seat weighing 18–25 kg — and the steering column into 580 cars every day. It was physically exhausting. In hopes of becoming permanent and to avoid being reported, we avoided even talking to each other.

In 2009, I became permanent. When commuting to and from work, some of us would discuss union-building, and we'd hear stories of similar conversations taking place at different factories. Everybody agreed that a union was necessary, but we didn't know how to proceed.

2011: The Movement Takes Shape

By 2011, the salary for permanent workers was Rs. 8,000 per month, with an Rs. 8,000 attendance bonus given to those who didn't take any holidays. For every day you took off, your bonus would be docked by 25%!

But now, the union movement was gaining traction. We secretly began collecting signatures to register a union — we had to do this in secret to avoid the management's vigilance teams — and submitted the file to the Chandigarh labour department. In response, Maruti collected counter-signatures saying the workers were content. But the workers knew that we were strong, because we were the ones who controlled the production. We also knew that the further we went from the factory, the weaker our position would be. We stopped production and occupied the company premises on 4th June. We began holding loud protests inside the plant — permanent, apprentice, contract, and trainees united.

13 Days of Occupation: A Turning Point

Managers panicked, locked bathrooms, cut off drinking water, and called the police. Workers took control of the plant for 13 days. We built solidarity — workers of all castes and creeds and from all regions stood together. We slept on the roads, managed electricity and water, cared for the sick, and cooked together. Food was shared, no matter how little. Camaraderie reached new heights.

Despite a court stay order barring entry, we held strong, forming human chains and resisting police action. On the third day, we arranged to have food cooked outside and sent inside. We even marched naked through the campus in protest.

Eventually, 97 workers were suspended (they were reinstated later). The most revolutionary among us became even more determined. Our bonds deepened. We saw clearly who supported us and who didn't.

Setbacks and Resistance

After 13 days, we joined work again after a settlement with the management. All workers were taken back, including those who got terminated and suspended. There was a sense of collective power and victory as we joined production. Despite everything, our union registration was rejected. In end-August, The company began demanding workers sign a "good conduct" undertaking to re-enter the plant. We refused and staged a sit-in outside.

Maruti brought in new workers by bus to run the production. Some protesters stopped the buses, removed the supervisors and scared off the company bouncers. Within just 10 minutes, they were all beaten — workers and even supervisors. After that, no one wanted to work, and the strike continued. The movement's leadership was arrested, and released three days later. In the end-September, we agreed to sign the 'good

conduct bond' and joined the production. Only permanent workers were allowed back in for work — contract workers were left outside. After working for three days, the permanent workers stopped production and took control of the production plant again, demanding the return of contract workers.

Inside the plant, permanent workers held their ground, while outside, others supported by taking control of different units of Suzuki plants. Together, we forced management to listen to our demands. In response, the company obtained a high court order and brought in CRPF forces to evacuate the plant. Still, workers refused to back down. Eventually, we vacated the plant but continued the strike from outside.

We were continuously being threatened, even by the Haryana Chief Minister. After some time, the company proposed a deal: if 30 permanent workers accepted Rs. 16 *lakhs* each and left, the rest would be allowed to keep their jobs. The leadership accepted the deal, leaving many workers feeling betrayed. This marked a turning point. We restarted the union-formation process.

In the end-February, 2012, a union was formally registered. Through the union formation process, we learned a lot — not just about organizing, but also about production itself. Once, we even managed to make 580 cars when the company had mandated 550, all because of how well we knew the process

and each other. If management didn't cooperate, we stopped production. They couldn't even figure out where we had slowed the line down! The entire control was with us. We even decided to increase the production time for a single car from 40 seconds to 1 minute.

Then the event of 18th July and the big fire happened. We realized that the company was trying to turn a labor dispute into a criminal case.

What We Had Learned

But by this time we had also gained deeper insight into each other's struggles — not just in Maruti, but in other companies too. It wasn't quite us developing "class consciousness," but we understood each other's lives and working conditions. We understood each other's needs better.

We moved beyond the traditional approach of central trade unions that often settle through compromise. We saw that this older approach no longer had any strength, and "fight" in it. Our thinking evolved. We raised broader, national-level demands — most notably, ending the contract labour system. For a time, management agreed not to use contract workers in production, but that didn't last.

Unfortunately, the fire (and the manager's death) put a stop to this progress. Some people were jailed, others had to start making rounds of the courts, the functioning of the union was

affected, and the unity between permanent and non-permanent workers deteriorated under pressure. Not only our union but the entire Indian labour movement suffered a blow.

The Movement Today

Lives of Terminated Workers after Maruti

The workers who had been fired had just experienced a historic movement, and so the first thing they did was organise against the firing. So, till 2015, we were continually protesting, taking out processions, etc. We thought that maybe we could get the jobs back, if not today then tomorrow.

Over time, different people did different things. One person would start helping at a family member's tea shop, another would become a labourer in some other place. But, apart from 10–12 people, no one could get a steady job and get settled. So workers were getting very stressed. All were trying to work and fight cases in court, while their responsibilities at home kept increasing.

The workers who came back on 18th September 2024, to take part in the movement, to fight the company... they had not been able to get settled. It is their economic hardship, their lack of prospects, that brought them there.

They realised that they could do something about their situations by joining the movement. If not by getting their jobs back, maybe they could get some compensation that they could use to start some work, get settled, etc. This is what they were thinking when they came.

Remember, they aren't naive. They know that if you take part in the movement, then you can go to jail also, you can have cases put against you, there can be a *lathi*-charge on you, anything can happen. So why are they still coming? Because they don't have any other options.

From 2012 to 2024

We did so many things in the last 12 years, and we were intensely maligned for it. We marched on foot, did cycle *yatras* throughout Haryana, we marched on foot to Jantar Mantar, we did demonstrations in front of the ministry. On 29th May 2013 there was a case filed against us. In these cases, we even involved sympathetic people from *khap panchayats*. Even the chief of a *khap panchayat* was jailed. Over time, people in Haryana finally understood that what was happening to us wasn't right. It took quite a bit of time to make people see that this label of criminal that we had been branded with was wrong.

Then there was this whole process where workers wanted to see what would happen in court. Their expectations were never

high, but they didn't understand very clearly that nothing is going to happen in the legal system. It is just not for us.

We had done many programs before that. We used to have a meeting every 18th July (anniversary of the event that started the phase of repression and imprisonment), we used to march to the gates of the factory on 1st March (anniversary of Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union flag day), etc. But we needed to find a way to increase the pressure. For two years we were discussing the logistics of this movement. So finally, we decided to start our demonstration in Manesar on 18th September 2024.

The Dharna Begins

When we went to start the dharna on 18th September, the company went to court. We had intended to camp at Gate No. 2, but they made us stay at least 500 m away. We did not mind, how much difference is there after all? We also thought that if not Gate No. 2, we can sit at Gates No. 1, 3, or 4. The court order effectively allowed us to stage our sit-in 500 m away from Gate No. 2, and that gave us strength.

We set up 500 m away, and the police set up 7 km away. They felt that we could not keep it going and we would pack up soon. We didn't have that much money, the factory union wasn't supporting us, most permanent workers weren't with us. They thought that we didn't have much going for us and we would get burnt out and go home. This is exactly what

happened in the Bellsonica movement a while back, it stopped after five months for exactly these reasons.

But our attitude was that we would put in all our effort. We kept going to the gate, talking to workers, distributing leaflets, protesting etc. We focused on non-permanent workers, who make up 83% of the workforce. They are more repressed, more exploited, and yet production runs on their backs. We tried to reach out to them and distributed our pamphlets among them. Soon, we started receiving phone calls from them. We prepared a demand letter on their behalf, took the signatures of 500 workers and, on 18th November 2024, we submitted it to the labour department. Then we went back to campaigning among the temporary workers.

Slowly, workers started coming to our sit-in. In fact, in the whole of IMT [Industrial Model Town, Manesar, which has factories of many companies], whenever a worker had a grievance they came to us.

Non-Permanent Workers Who Had Been Let Go

There were also non-permanent workers who had been denied a permanent job and let go. They had been told that if they did good work they would get permanent jobs. They also didn't get any skills which they could use elsewhere. We reached out to them and told them about the demand letter we had filed. We spoke to them about maybe submitting a demand letter for

them also, and decided to hold a meeting on these issues. We thought we would get maybe 50 workers. After receiving a few phone calls, we adjusted our estimate to 200–300. We held the meeting on 5th January, and the number of workers who came is 3,400.

All of these were workers who had worked at Maruti in the past and been let go. Speaking to them, we understood that they were not getting any other work. Neither did Maruti keep them at work, nor did any other company value their experience at Maruti. Where could they go?

What were their demands? They said that they had been cheated. For years, they went through various types of training. Then they were kept as TW1 (temporary worker 1), then TW2, etc. All in all, the company had taken 5–6 years out of their lives. For this, they got very little money, which they accepted because of the promise that they would get better permanent jobs later. And then they were not kept. So the first demand is for the company to explain why they didn't allow them the chance to become permanent. The second point is that they did full work, so they should get full compensation. Why are 83% of workers temporary when nearly all are doing main production work? And even in the new Kharkhoda plant they aren't keeping any permanent workers. Not only were they not paid fairly, the experience isn't even good for another job. The most energetic years of their lives, when they could have tried new things, have been lost to this work; now there

are family responsibilities and other issues they have to face. The third demand is that someone must take responsibility for their lives being ruined. If not the Maruti company, then the Haryana government. If not the state government, then central. Where else can the workers go? Asking for a job is their right, and providing an income is the government's responsibility. The final, and most concrete demand, is that the first opportunity for the 30,000 jobs at the new Kharkhoda plant (an upcoming plant that will be Asia's biggest) be given to these workers who have already been used and discarded by the company.

We decided to submit their demand letter on 10th January 2025. Around seven thousand workers came for this! We announced that if our demands weren't agreed to by 30th January, we would hold a big rally. We would have a procession in Manesar on the 30th, and go to the Labour department on the 31st.

'Manesar Chalo' Rally

The company went to court, and we got a stay. The stay said that we could protest 500 m away from the factory. On the 29th, the police came, packed up all the tents and other things that we had kept at the sit-in, and took it away.

We had gone all out in preparing for the 30th program. We had prepared 30 feet by 12 feet banners and flags with the issues of

asthaayi (temporary) workers written on them. The flag was mounted on 35-feet-long poles, and the flag was proportionately big, saying "Workers of the world, unite!" There were teams for painting, design, music, sound system and many other things. And we had planned to distribute torches in the night. Imagine 10,000 people marching in the night with a torch, what a sight that would have been! The police felt that this was very dangerous. The layout of IMT itself would have changed; all of the workers in IMT would come together.

By this time, Hero workers had spoken to us, and had formed the Hero MotoCorp Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh. 60–70 people were going to come with us on the 30th. Honda workers were also going to come. Police were worried it would spread further.

This was going to be a big event. And however big a mobilisation it is, that is how much attack it will face. On the 29th they removed us. On the 30th they detained us. On the 31st we were going to go again. When they left us on the 30th night, we slept in the court only: who was going to look for a place to stay that late in the night? In the morning they removed us from the court so we took a *dharamshala*. They spoke to the owner and made the owner remove us from the *dharamshala*. Their repression was very intense, but we didn't back down.

We went to high court, both against the declaration of Section 144 and also against them not letting the demonstration happen. The high court kept ordering the DC to allow us to do the rally and give us space, but DC kept stalling. So our efforts were blocked completely.

Kharkhoda Chalo

On 6th April, we did a program at Kharkhoda. Maruti is building a new 900-acre factory in Kharkhoda which will employ 30,000 people, none of them permanent. We were planning to stage a demonstration and submit our demands. The principal demand was that the company should employ the workers they had trained and cast aside.

At 12 PM, we gathered at a park opposite the bus stand. The bus stand is quite far from the company grounds. People had started reaching from 10 AM onwards in small groups of maybe five to seven people from various places. By 12 PM, maybe 300 had reached.

The police were there from morning itself. They started chasing off anyone they saw who looked young, especially those who had bags in which they could potentially be carrying supplies for the demonstration. They didn't let people stay at the bus stand or enter the park. We knew they would do this; they had already sent a notice saying what inquiries would be made against people who gathered there. They had also

threatened to file cases against us, claiming that the locals had asked them to keep us away because they were worried about what would happen.

So the ones who reached earliest were chased away, some were even forced to get onto buses that were going back to Gurgaon. One of the members of the Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee who lived in Kharkhoda got taken by the police in the morning itself. Another member had left his phone at home and left for the demonstration by the time they reached his house, but even he was identified and detained in the morning.

We had our system of how to reach and how to gather workers. At 12 PM, we all gathered at an alternate location. The police started chasing some of us who were in a car, and those inside the car took the opportunity to lead the police away so that the procession could begin. 20–25 workers started the procession.

The police detained all 25 or so of us, including both non-permanent and terminated workers, and put us in a bus. They took the bus into farmland and stopped there. They told us they had no enmity with us, but they had to stay with us till 7 PM. They wouldn't stop us from going to the bathroom or drinking water or anything, just needed to stay with us. 12–13 people had been taken to the police station separately and they were beaten up.

Because the Kharkhoda plant is the beginning of a massive plan

involving a new IMT, the management was quite scared. We had also pamphleted among ITI students in Kharkhoda and some of them had called us. They were worried that if they allowed us to do even one program then this might not stop, so they stopped it.

And workers are also scared. Wherever they go, police turn up, they beat up workers, they can file cases, they can arrest workers and so on. Especially since 29th January, the type of repression we have faced has made many workers scared. Even their families feel that it's unlikely that they'll get the jobs but it's far more likely that they'll end up in jail. So, the morale of both terminated and non-permanent workers is relatively low now and they feel that things should only go forward if the high court allows us to restart the sit-in.

Reaction of Workers Inside the Factory

One section of the permanent workers helped us behind the scenes. The non-permanent workers joined us, some even before we did the rallies to reach out to them. Not enough to stop production, but they supported us and came to our programs.

There is a union across all four Maruti plants. The union said they supported us, but in reality they were completely unwilling to support us when we had genuine conflict with management. They helped us with legal fees, they would

organise the programs every 18th July, etc.

A small section of the permanent workers supported us. But again, when supporting us would have put their jobs on the line, they would never be with us.

We made a much stronger bond with the non-permanent workers. But now that we can't campaign in Manesar regularly, this has broken now. There is still a connection, but not enough.

Attempts to Reach out to Workers in the Plants

We used to distribute leaflets among them. The leaflets had our phone numbers, so they would call us. We would then do meetings in their rooms. Small meeting, with 5-6-7 workers. Some of the supportive permanent workers also gave us contacts of non-permanent workers. Even the ones who had been let go, there were some people in the plants in contact with them.

We were able to reach out to maybe 10% of non-permanent workers. Because of the vigilance of the company and all, we couldn't reach out to more.

After 31st January, the support has reduced.

Politicising the Struggle

We can't say that a political consciousness has been awakened in a lot of the workers. But that is not to say that nothing has been achieved.

For example, when we talk about the court system and explain that the courts are just not for us to our comrades, they agree completely. They understand that they are completely for the rich, controlled by the capitalists. They understand how the courts make us run in circles.

But not at the level of working class consciousness. Maybe a relatively small section of workers have this, but... in most cases, most workers don't have the resolve to stay on the field no matter how bad things get. They haven't internalised that this is a long-term struggle and it can only be won by continuing to fight for a long time.

We've discussed so many things like Bhagat Singh, different workers' struggles, what the courts and the state really are, but the consciousness has not got to that level for many. But it is a slow process, we focus on politicising one or two workers first, then one or two more, etc.

Political Consciousness in 2012

Even in 2012, the political consciousness was not that developed. The achievements at that time were more due to the

strength we get when a strong movement is happening. The energy and momentum drove a lot of the struggle.

This is enough to run a campaign, but... if there was political consciousness then workers would have kept standing even after the repression. If they had been politically conscious, they would have joined this movement in much larger numbers, for example.

Trade Union Consciousness

Even though one can't say they have developed political consciousness yet, they certainly have a strong trade union consciousness. This is why there have been so many struggles in the sector in the last 10 years, at Honda, Bellsonica, etc. Wherever workers went, they took with them the conviction that it was important to band together into a union.

The Reasons for This

When we work in the company, whether for 8 hours or 11 hours... all day, we are able to see the repressive powers of the factory owners. Practically, we feel their power. And even outside, there is a different type of oppression we face in society. So, both outside and inside, they see the power of the capitalists.

And after termination, what sort of environment do they live in? It's with their families, and in the issues they face there they

see no enmity with the capitalists. And in that context, they get deeper into other things like religion and TV and other such cultural things.

In the end, they just don't have the sort of environment that a person needs for political and intellectual development. They just get stuck deeper and deeper into their many economic and personal problems. This is my understanding.

Even the farmers' movement improved the environment, especially in Punjab. But Punjab already has a history of people's struggles. Here there is not so much history, and how long will this effect of the farmers' movement stay here?

Political consciousness can only grow in struggle, and workers' mobilisation has reduced a lot. For example, in Gurgaon and Manesar, in 2008–9, most workers were made permanent. Even contract workers were kept for a long time and given a chance to become permanent. They all faced economic hardship. The permanent workers have fought an economic struggle, and won many things. Now they have too much to lose, not enough to gain. If your salary is more than a lakh, why would you take a risk? And they have no social contact with non-permanent workers any more. And, on the other side, non-permanent workers are learning that nothing is theirs. That they don't have any rights. So they are completely dejected. And we have to see how to break this cycle, how to teach workers their rights and convince them to stand up for

themselves

Reasons for Intensity of Repression

When we go up against a company as big as Maruti on an issue like non-permanent workers, we are not going against just Maruti. Whether we say it or not, we are against the whole automobile sector. We can also think of it as being against the Indian capitalist class. And they understand this.

Most of their workers are non-permanent, and it is the non-permanent workers who do most of the work. So it is they who have the most power to hurt the company, and also they have nothing to lose. So this is where the company is most vulnerable and they know it.

If someone raises a voice on behalf of non-permanent workers and this spreads, then things will get out of hand for the companies. Every company's non-permanent workers will unionise and start fighting for their rights. This can become a really big movement.

A company like Maruti won't talk to the Haryana CM in these matters, they will go directly to Modi or Shah. And orders coming from up there will also make the police take the matter much more seriously.

And, really, regularisation of non-permanent workers is a very big demand. It is very hard for the company to do, and that is

why they need to attack us. And that is what they are doing.

Did Rank-and-File Workers Make this Connection?

They understand this very clearly, about the company, the police and the government.

But the fact that this is not the fight of a day or two, but a long fight that can take up our entire lifetimes, this is something they aren't completely clear about. They see that escalating and expanding is not an easy job. But they get stuck on the question of how long this will go on.

They will need to do some work or the other to keep themselves fed. But if you work, that is 10–12 hours of your life and then there is no time left for the movement. They get stuck on this question of how you can live your life, raise your family and still work in the movement. One might hope that a few people here and there turn out to have the stamina needed for this, but it looks like that is also not happening.

This is in fact one of the responsibilities of every revolutionary party also, to help people stay in the game. There was a time when middle class people would support us, when intellectual class would come and join us. And workers even liked political workers.

Now, suppose we are asking for some money. Workers can't give much. And middle class people... well, the middle class is

not supporting us that much. So workers also end up feeling that it is not good to give their money to this when they can use it for their family's needs instead. They call it *maang ke khana* (asking for money to eat). Earlier there was some respect for political work and people didn't look down on asking for money in this connection.

They are genuinely willing to take part in the movement. But they are all worried, what will we earn? What will we eat? How will we raise our family? Who will deal with medical fees? Without solving these issues, I don't see how movement will go forward.

Funds are there only in the NGO system, but the NGO system is not really for us. If we take their money, the movement will only lose. No matter how good the people in the NGO are, its class alignment is completely clear. They are only interested in controlling you and advancing capitalist interests.

So, to repeat, the main point is that if anyone wants to join the movement, what will they earn and how will their needs be met? Without solving this nothing will happen.

Automation and De-Skilling

The way to think about this new Kharkhoda plant is this. Before Manesar, there was a plant at Gurgaon which was pretty outdated. This is why the Manesar plant was made, to have a

plant with a lot of robot systems. This is also why Manesar was the frontier of contractualisation and that is why it was the frontier of the 2012 movement. Similarly, the Kharkhoda plant is being made with even more robot systems.

This is why they need even fewer permanent workers now. The training will be there only for name; currently a worker is taken to a station the moment he joins and the actual training only lasts a week. Then he is made to work at that station till he leaves. In fact, even those workers who are learning and then joining are getting de-skilled by this.

Earlier, even if you didn't become permanent in Maruti, you had learned so much about so many technologies that you often got a job in another company. Now, everyone knows that a Maruti worker has no skills worth employing them for. Of course, this is happening in all companies. This whole Skill India campaign is a scam, they give money to owners for this and then there is no accountability whatsoever.

Agniveer

This is part of a broader trend. Remember the Agnipath scheme? Even there, Agniveers could work in the armed forces for five years and then go back to society. They said that more people will get a chance to do work, but in the end they will have nowhere to go after the four years are over.

Similarly, the way these big companies are doing business, more and more people are getting a chance to do some work, so the total number of jobs is going up. But no one asks what the quality of the work is and how stable it is. It's the same in Agnipath and Maruti and Honda and others: they don't need permanent workers any more.

The protests against the Agnipath scheme were very strong. People mobilised across the country, buses were burned down etc. But we don't see that here. The difference is that everyone saw this was wrong. The whole country knew that an army job should be a stable and permanent job, and many people depended on this. But company jobs are not in the public sector so people don't know their rights. And also, far fewer people know what's happening inside private companies.

The Central Issue is Unemployment

Think about how we understood a job in say 2000. We thought a job was something you had till 58 years of age, and then you retired. But now we have no clue what a job is. We have one job today, that one tomorrow, that one day after. Some people are getting a monthly salary, some per day, some per hour. There is no clarity.

This is fundamentally happening because there is no work anywhere. We are doing whatever we can. What we are facing is just one face of what the working class is facing in the entire

world, which is why it's so hard to fight. We can't hurt the company economically because we can't plan strikes easily now. It is a long and protracted effort.

Till then, we will keep the struggle going. People will join with us for a while on and off, but not that much will change. After that, we have to bring forward the unemployment issue.

RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)

The RSS's game is unimaginably good. If you investigate them carefully, you start to understand how big their plans are and how much they have done. We are nowhere close. At least, I can't speak for all of India, but at least the part I've seen.

I go to parks in Gurgaon in the mornings often. They've changed everything. Here there's a statue, here there's a new plaza, there there's a new plaza. They regularly have programs where they play songs, do yoga, and have religious sermons. There are no special programs, they have just made it part of the everyday. They infuse their politics in everything from food to exercise.

And they plan things according to region also. Here, in Haryana and Punjab, Jaats are very dominant. The farmers' movement made this force very anti-BJP. This has also been created for capitalists in this area. So, recently, they released this new movie *Jaat* starring Sunny Deol and Randeep Hooda

(who is from Rohtak) and they are arranging free screenings. I saw that even people who were active in the farmers' movement were planning to go to one of these screenings and do a road show afterwards.

The Main Achievements of the Struggle

Every day, every activity, has its own achievements. This struggle is still ongoing, so we can't answer this question completely right now.

But one achievement is very clear: we have shown that this can happen. Even after 12 years, we can come back and have a struggle this big. If we can do it, so can others.

Winning and losing are not black-and-white things. Some people have developed in new ways, others have started thinking differently, some have taken this energy back to their hometowns.

On the whole, we can say this: under Modi rule, going into IMT Manesar, staging a sit-in and keeping it going for months, with no union support, running it so well, with singing and dancing and exercise and sports and joy, all this was possible. When we would sit together before the struggle began, we were dreading it. But in doing all the activities, putting up posters, running from police, making rounds of the station, pamphleteering, sharing in each other's happiness and sorrow,

cooking for each other, we ended up taking pleasure in all this.

Finally, we got confirmation that we attacked at exactly the right spot. This is why so much repression happened.

Main Challenges Facing the Movement

We weren't able to involve the workers working in Maruti right now, both permanent and non-permanent. Permanent workers, we haven't been able to involve them in the struggle at the level matching the requirements of the struggle. Maybe 5% of these kept in touch. With the non-permanent workers, the engagement was created by the terminated workers; this is not a simple matter because of various issues between the types of workers. But even then, we were able to join 50–60 of these workers into the movement, at the level of coming to our programs, giving their opinions, helping out, and so on.

We did make a demand letter for them also, but we were not able to give them a clear place within the struggle. What responsibilities do they have to us? What responsibilities do we have to them? These sorts of questions aren't clear.

Another weakness was this. In the area there are many other plants, of vendor companies like Bellsonica, Honda, Hero, etc. We are completely uncertain what sort of unity we can make with these workers, and what issues can be raised on their behalf. And what role will terminated workers play here?

Further, suppose that we form this unity. The fact is that the workers are not thinking about the interests of the working class and how to unite the class. They are only thinking about their immediate goals, like terminated workers are thinking mostly about settlement for lost jobs and non-permanent workers are thinking about regularisation and their wages.

But those who have understood that these demands are part of a long-term struggle, those who will last in the stadium, they are few. And even if they last, what will they do? How will his family run? Where will he work? We need a plan for these things.

To run this struggle, we need leadership, and the question is where this leadership will come from.

The other question is that there are so many people who work for a few years, maybe after a non-permanent job or ITI or whatever, and then can't find a job: how do we unite with these people? There are three types of such workers. First is those who work for one or two years and have gone back to their village and their farm or family business. Second is those who are doing ITI. Third is those who are working right now.

Future Prospects

The first thing is to form deeper bonds with the workers. We plan to target ITI students, explaining to them how few

prospects they had after this.

We are also trying to get permission to stage another sit-in. If we get permission we will start again. And we will keep trying to find new ways to reach workers and address their issues. We need to keep it fresh, otherwise we will get tired.

We also have to be patient. We don't know which issue will affect which worker and mobilise them. The condition is such that some issues will make a mark but we need to keep trying to keep our fingers on the pulse.

The Significance

Some Insights and Tendencies

In this section, we attempt to draw some lessons from the protracted struggle and contextualise it in a broader perspective of changing the production and labour process and the dynamic of class struggle.

Insights for The Trade Union Movement

Firstly, the practice of democracy within different phases of the Maruti struggle is an important aspect to explore. After the struggle started in 2011, nearly 150 line coordinators, each representing a production line, along with the union body in the plant, were involved in making important decisions, implementing them, and gathering feedback. After 18th July, the movement was run through a representative provisional committee of workers, along with district and state coordinator bodies. Important steps were taken through general body meetings of workers. This deep connection of the workers with the movement ensured that the leadership, union and movement could never come under the influence of management. Established central trade union organisations attempted to bring it under their control but did not succeed.

The second important aspect is the adaptivity and resilience of the struggle. Often, on losing its leadership, a movement also loses much of its momentum and an attack on the leading files of workers is enough to put an end to the struggle. But here, new leadership emerged every time there was a setback. Even after 30 leaders left the factory after the third strike, and after 18th July, when 149 people including the entire union body went to jail and 66 remained absconding, new leadership emerged and pushed the movement forward. This is an astonishing success. This success was a result of the deep democratic process that developed within the movement.

The ability to maneuver the many highs and lows of the movement reflects the maturity of the movement's leadership. Consider the immense repression unleashed after the 18th July incident. The second set of leaders who emerged inside the company after the resignation of 30 workers, including all the union body members of Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union, were put behind bars. Apart from the union leadership, the administration, working hand in glove with the management, selectively arrested the workers most active in the movement. Even after the formation of the Provisional Working Committee, the administration arrested one important member of the committee, Imaan Khan, in January 2013, even though there were no substantial allegations against him, and forced another member of the committee to retreat from the movement through constant threats of arrest. Out of the

remaining five members of the committee the administration arrested one and kept him in jail for two months on fabricated charges. Despite all these attempts to decimate the movement, the workers repeatedly reorganized their movement and a fresh batch of workers came forward to replenish the front ranks of leadership and shoulder old as well as new responsibilities.

A third important aspect is the development of class initiative and collective action. The workers could see for themselves how important unified action was in keeping the militancy and effectiveness of the movement alive. The high degree of spontaneity in the movement, the absence of any already established 'big' leaders (for example, big names of the trade union movement or established leaders of the Central Trade Unions), and the role of collective action in establishing the emerging leadership made the relationship between the rank-and-file workers and the leadership much stronger than in most trade unions, right from the first phase of the struggle.

After the end of the first round of struggle in October 2011, the general body of workers took a larger role in the decision-making process of the movement. Such a practice of democracy within the movement offers an extremely important lesson not only for the trade union movement but for all other mass movements. It also throws light on the delicate relationship between the content of the movement and the strength of the organisational process involved.

To integrate workers from various regions into the decision-making process of the movement, representatives of various states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana were elected to the Provisional Working Committee. With the development of the movement, the line-coordinators, earlier responsible primarily for maintaining communication and coordination amongst workers, found a greater role in the process of opinion-building within the union organisation. After 18th July, this was maintained by District Coordinators.

It would be useful to give an illustration of this democratic process developing within the movement. After a meeting with the then Chief Minister in Kaithal, the question arose of withdrawing the indefinite hunger strike. To decide the course of action, first a meeting of the Provisional Working Committee was held. However, the seriousness of the issue made it difficult for the question to be resolved at this level, therefore a meeting of the District Coordinators was held, and when no decision could be reached even in this body, GBMs of various districts were conducted, followed by a second round of meetings at the District Coordinator and Provisional Working Committee levels. It was only then that a conclusion was reached.

After the surrender of the initial leadership following the third strike, the workers remained forever vigilant towards such a tendency to compromise or surrender. The workers also had an

experience of this problem from Rico and other prior movements. The workers maintained constant pressure on all representatives who emerged after the first phase of the struggle. This was particularly true for those who assumed leadership of the process of unionisation inside the factory in 2012.

Another important aspect is the content of demands raised by the struggle, along with the increased sense of worker's control over production, as evinced for example by the increase in takt time. The difference that the movement brought to the actual working conditions of the workers made it different from other tendencies in the trade union movement dominant at that time, which primarily focussed on economic gains. In those instances, despite deriving some benefits, there is little qualitative difference in life before and after the period of struggle. The movement in Maruti, however, brought about a transformation in the lives of all the workers who participated in it, in the way they looked at themselves, at the world, at the state, and at society. This movement was never the product of any one big leader or any one organisation, but of the unity of the workers who participated in it.

The aspirations that took root in the workers and the heavy-handed attitude taken by the management towards them allowed no leadership of the union to become 'negotiators' who exercised disproportionate control over the actions of the union. As a result, the kind of opportunism often found in

'successful' trade union leadership did not have a chance to take root. Therefore at no moment did negotiation-centric politics manage to dominate the movement.

The forced resignation of the leadership of the MSEU in 2011 had given rise to resentment and hatred towards the Maruti management and the labour department in the minds of the Maruti workers. Even after the union was registered in 2012, day-to-day issues intensified this feeling. The management's pressure on an independently functioning union, illegally continuing production with trainee and contract workers, lack of basic rights on the job like breaks and adequate rest for workers, and lack of provision for housing and their children's education, taken together, indicated an extreme apathy for the workers. The management undertook repeated and surreptitious steps to invalidate the settlement process, thus attempting to make the union ineffective and portray the struggle for union formation as meaningless for workers. In short, it can be said that the Maruti management repeatedly tried to prove that the activities and scope of trade unions are actually determined by the owners, and that labour leadership must understand and adapt to this. The incident of 18th July was a rebellion born of spontaneous anger against this meticulously constructed trade union system, through which workers, with a powerful jolt, pushed their lives and livelihoods out of the narrow confines of the trade union movement and confronted the entire system of exploitation and oppression by

capitalists.

The Maruti movement represented a new stream of spontaneous struggle by automobile workers against the exploitation by capitalists in new production settings. Today, due to the Maruti movement, many recognize the need to strengthen the militant, independent, and democratic axis of trade union movement outside the bureaucratic practices of many established trade unions across Gurgaon and the entire country. The Maruti workers' struggle has become a symbol for this, however incipient this tendency may have been in the actual struggle.

Also, the Maruti movement has had a significant impact on the regional trade union landscape. As a result of the movement, a powerful company like Maruti was forced to announce an end to the employment of contract workers in the core production process at its Manesar plant. The movement has left its mark on the changes in the wage structure of workers in the automobile sector in the Gurgaon-Manesar area. After 18th July, wages increased by Rs. 13,000 at Maruti's Gurgaon and Manesar plants and by Rs. 17,000 at Honda. Moreover, it can be said that this struggle has had a positive impact on the wage structure in the country's automobile industry.

Lastly, the recent struggle of non-permanent workers of Maruti Suzuki has presented a new possibility in the trade union movement. The increasing informalisation and casualisation of

work in the most advanced manufacturing sectors like automobiles has limited the control of permanent-worker based unions on production and its ability to strike. Also the wage gap between permanent and non-permanent workers, and the temporary nature of job of the latter, have made it difficult to develop a united struggle of permanent and non-permanent workers inside the factories and in the industrial area. Increasingly, the unions based on the membership of permanent workers, lacking the capacity to influence production and build larger class unity and having many things to lose, have become more defensive in their approach and distant from the interests of non-permanent workers. Increasing automation has effectively made the permanent workers and their skill set more disposable, and the burden of production has shifted on the non-permanent workers. The increasing mobility of capital and its capacity to transfer production from one plant to another has rendered the struggling capacity of plant-based unions more limited. Despite the remarkable history of permanent-contract unity in the early phase of Maruti workers' struggle, these changes have been reflected in the Maruti union and MSMS too. In general, permanent worker-based unions — finding their bases eroded by the push towards contractualisation, and therefore representing a minority of the workforce with limited ability to affect production — often are unable to build militant and protracted resistance against the massive offensives of the capitalist class and are increasingly forced to adopt a more

compromised position, except in a few exceptional cases. Those who fought the historic battles for union formation in different industrial areas across India — and achieved success in many cases — are now realising they no longer have the capacity to lead the militant struggles of the day. This erosion of the influence of permanent-worker-based trade unions is a important factor in the stagnation of the Indian trade union movement.

In this context, the non-permanent workforce, who face increasing precarity, job insecurity, degradation of work, minimal wages and social security, and a vacant future ahead, and have almost no scope to negotiate with the management, are objective placed to be a motive force for a possible militant tendency in contemporary trade union movement. The production is mostly run by them. They work in different factories in an industrial belt, and have a more generalized experience. They have little to lose in struggles. If united at the regional or sectoral level, they can shake the foundation of just-in-time production. Yet, they have not so far been organised in any industrial belt and play their role as a motive force of struggle in an effective scale or way, apart from some sporadic struggles here and there. There are many reasons for this. The established trade union movement does not represent the unorganised labour in advanced organised sectors, labour law protections mostly do not cover them, precarious conditions do not let them continue protracted struggles, their

insecure jobs do not allow them to get organised at the level of factories, and they lack resources to build movements of effective scales and scopes, among others.

The militant struggle of non-permanent workers of Maruti Suzuki in the beginning of this year, demanding dignified secure jobs, wage parity and a secure future, thus inspired many workers and trade union activists. These workers are working in various automobile factories across the industrial belt, after leaving Maruti Suzuki. Thus they have networks to connect *lakhs* of non-permanent workers across the belt. MSAMS connected non-permanent workers of Hero MotoCorp, Honda and numerous other factories, where members of MSAMS presently worked. The struggle created a different possibility in the contemporary trade union movement in scale and scope. And thus it invited uninterrupted repression from state machinery.

Insights for Left Transformative Politics

One of the most important lessons from the Maruti movement for the radical left forces is that radical left politics can gain space in India's organized industrial sector. Maruti workers' militant struggle and the intensity of class conflict in core areas of capitalist accumulation, such as the industrial belts, reflected the potential for engagement of radical left politics in main production areas of new capital investment.

The movement also gained a lot from the democratic and radical left-minded organisations and people. The continuous and unconditional support of progressive and radical left forces, and through them, the assistance of various progressive organisations and labour organisations nationwide, helped workers to reduce their dependence on central trade unions and advance the movement more independently. When militant workers adopted new forms of struggle, faced intense repression from management and administration, they received virtually no support from established trade unions, leading to a crisis for the movement. These crises happened especially after the resignation of the worker leadership after the third strike, after the 18th July incident in the face of state repression, and during subsequent long periods of crisis. Radical left forces helped workers understand the true significance of the movement, going beyond the narrow confines of wins and losses in trade union struggles, and boosted their morale.

In various phases of the Maruti movement, when workers took many inspiring steps solely through their collective initiative, they received assistance from radical left forces and struggling trade unions across the country. Moreover, Maruti workers for the first time came into contact with various streams of the radical left. Though they maintained relationships with other political parties and streams due to the necessities of the movement, they learnt, through their own experience, how to differentiate (to some extent) between radical left streams and

others.

Radical left activists also gained much hope and enthusiasm from movements like Maruti. That workers can mount such a long and unyielding — indeed, almost impossible — struggle against such a powerful capitalist group like Maruti, in the face of repression from the entire Haryana police and administration, enduring jail, *lathi*-charges, and unemployment is a source of inspiration for the radical left, especially those who fight for the awakening of the working class against capitalist exploitation and oppression in today's relatively stagnant times. This movement has also served as a basis for relationships among various radical left forces and progressive labour organisations across the country. Many radical forces and trade unions established contact with each other and that later helped them coordinate All-India campaigns and actions, and to form a separate struggling axis of the workers' movement. One such initiative later formed the Mazdoor Adhikar Sangharsh Abhiyan (MASA) in 2016, consisting of 15 struggling and revolutionary unions and workers' organisations from different parts of the country.

The present struggle of non-permanent workers of Maruti Suzuki drew significant attention and support of struggling workers organisations. When the police crackdowns took place, different organisations held solidarity protests in Haryana, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and other states. This section, for the left radical

forces, appears to be a new potential force for developing workers' struggles in organised industries in a militant way.

Some Structural Tendencies in the Labour Process,[5] Labour Regime, and Class Conflict

The objective basis of the Maruti struggle exemplifies larger changes in the last few decades in capital-labour relations at different levels — at the shop floor and at the level of regional and global production networks. These changes include changes in the labour process inside the factory, in the labour regime, and in the development of class conflict and class struggle. All these types of changes are dynamically interlinked, each influencing the other.

Briefly, the tendencies we see are as follows. The Fordist mass production regime for the most part of the twentieth century reflected a 'social contract' of collective bargaining based on the trade union framework. With the decline of Fordism from the 1970s and the rise of flexible, just-in-time and lean production processes in recent times, that social contract between labour and capital is being dismantled. This dismantling led to a crisis in the existing trade union movement, the other side of this social contract, which was rooted in the Fordist paradigm[6] of the 1960s and 1970s. With these changes, a new form of class-conflict developed in the advanced factories of new

industrial regions. These new types of class conflict were rooted in the contradiction of lean production at the factory floor. Contestation over controls of production and revolts against intensification and dehumanisation of labour was at the core of it, rather than simple bargaining on economic issues. This was a new militant tendency among workers, exemplified in the Maruti movement, threatening the core capitalist profit accumulation process under lean production. Over time, capital adopted counterstrategies to neutralise the militancy of workers. As a result, we are heading towards a 'techno-despotic' regime where the role of workers is becoming more and more like innumerable interchangeable cogs in a machine.

Class Formation

One important thing we can learn about from the Maruti movement is the process of class formation. Sometimes, people think of class as an unchanging category, e.g. "the proletarian class is made up of everyone who works for a wage." But, in reality, class is something that has to be *formed*, based on the inherent dynamics of production and social reproduction. From the experience of the Maruti movement, we can learn about how class initiative and class power forms on the factory floor, how it spreads from there to the regional and national scales, and how it interacts with other contradictions in society. These lessons are intertwined with the main tendencies that we are concerned with.

It is true that class formation has an objective basis in the organisation of production and labour. This objective basis is, however, not enough; there is also a subjective dimension. Active class conflict and struggle are needed to coalesce different workers into a common identity. Class struggle generates a sense of class power in its collective action that workers are unable to experience as atomised individuals, and this is a necessary condition for the articulation of the working class as a whole.

On the other hand, this agency of labour needs to be dealt with by capital. It does this by direct repression and also by restructuring the process of production to make class action harder. These counterstrategies can be seen throughout the capital-labour conflict in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt, and also specifically in the case of Maruti (as we have seen above).

The powers[7] of the working class can be described as 'associational' and 'structural' in the sphere of production. Associational power is the fact that workers are many and capitalists few; "the workers united will never be defeated," as the slogan goes. Structural power is their capacity to disrupt the production process because of their particular location in the production system. Different workers have different degrees of structural power, depending on how sensitive a node in the Global Production Network (GPN)[8] they are located in. As production is split up in assembly factories and different tiers

of supplier companies in just-in-time production, the associational power decreases for workers of individual factories. But at important nodes of production networks, structural power increases. The strike in the Maruti Manesar plant crippled the entire supply chain. The high structural power of workers in Maruti enabled them to fight a resilient and militant fight.

On the flip side, capital has more mobility and there is a massive reserve army of labour. So, it is possible for it to initiate changes in the production networks, at any level from regional to global, in response to workers' agitation. It can do this by changing the production process to break the unity of the workers, by making workers more replaceable, etc. There is a lot of room to manoeuvre. So, the workers' struggle may not be able to hold the ground it has won through struggles in the production process in the factories, in the wider socio-economic context, and as institutional reforms within the GPNs.

So, class formation is not eternal. Just as working class power can be consolidated, it can also dissipate. This dissipation can be caused by transformations in production process and labour regimes, internal segmentation and informalisation, weakening of class unity and class organisations due to repression, flight of capital, and many more reasons.

The main objective basis for class formation at the factory level,

in the automobile belt, is how terrible the working conditions are on the shop floor. This in turn has many reasons, the main one being the continuous deepening of real subsumption of labour under capital (increase in the power of capitalists due to technological innovation, a process we have seen at every stage of the struggle). In technologically advanced factories like Maruti, Honda, etc. and their first-tier component suppliers, the intensification and degradation of work affects all segments of the labour force, leading to a basis for unity and the beginning of a class formation process. This process consolidates as the capital-labour conflict sharpens and as workers actively participate in organised struggle against company management policies, both to improve work conditions and to increase greater control over the production process. This is how the fusion of structural and associational power begins.

The nascent nature of this class formation can be clearly seen from the fact that the struggling workers — in Maruti as well as other factories in the Gurgaon-Manesar belt — did not follow the usual route of preparing a coherent 'Charter of Demands' documenting specific economic demands which would form the basis of negotiations with the management. They went on strike without any prior notice. Traditionally, strikes are called after collective bargaining on the basis of a charter of demands fails, as the last resort negotiation tactic. But in the new automobile clusters, it is seen that the demands of the workers,

particularly in the initial phase of the struggle, are quite loosely articulated. Their demands are mostly connected to various dimensions of shop floor working conditions, dignity of work, workplace democracy and greater control over labour process, reflecting their desires to be more than an appendage to machines. The initial collective response is often of rebellion against the status quo, expressed through strikes. These demands then take a more concrete form in the course of struggle. Often this plethora of demands, because they are the same for all workers involved in the labour process, brings different sections of workers together. They express themselves through the demand of union formation: the union symbolises associational power and the collective bargaining strength needed to achieve the demands.

We see a similar dynamic at the regional level, as the class conflict develops. In the case of the Rico struggle in 2009 and the Maruti struggle in 2011–12, a process of regional class formation seems visible in the Gurgaon-Manesar region, as seen in the way the workers in many factories joined strike action in solidarity with the strike and factory occupation of Maruti Suzuki workers in October 2011 and new unions formed in different factories across the belt and regional collective class actions were taken. In the Alwar region, the Honda and Daikin workers' struggle for union formation came closer in 2017–18 to facilitate regional class formation process in a limited sense with the formation of 'Mazdoor Sangharsh

Samiti, Alwar.' This process of class formation and subsequent labour unrest seems to follow a generalised pattern, particularly in the new automobile clusters in India — in Sriperumbudur, in Rudrapur-Haridwar, in Pune-Nashik.

Characteristics of the Class Struggle: 2005-2015

These instances of labour unrest in Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt and other new industrial regions, of which Maruti workers' struggle is a glaring example, are deeply rooted in the floor-level experience of the labour processes.[2] Just-in-time production processes and the complex dynamics of modern production networks have made capital more vulnerable to labour unrest at important nodes of production networks. In the first instance, this increases the structural power of labour. But the development of structural and associational labour power and widening of class formation (whether at the local, regional, and national or transnational levels) faces a strong countertendency because of the strategic responses of capital. Capital uses its greater mobility, its (much) greater bargaining power with state institutions, and the massive reserve army of labour that exists at the regional and global levels, particularly in large developing countries, to weaken workers' bargaining power. The dynamic interplay of these tendencies decides the fate of capital-labour conflicts and influences reorganisation of labour processes, production networks, and labour organisation itself.

The period between 2005–2015 marks one decade of labour militancy in the automobile sector in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial region, the Maruti Suzuki workers' struggle being the pinnacle of that tendency. The success of militant workers' struggle for union formation at Honda Manesar plant in 2005 marked the beginning of this phase. In the decade that followed, nearly a hundred unions were formed in the automobile cluster, many involving multiple strikes, protracted struggles and heightened militancy of workers. Workers (mostly permanent workers), wherever successful in forming unions, could establish command over the production process, could raise their salaries and other benefits and also ensure job security. It can be argued that the last big offensive struggle of Honda workers of the Tapukara plant for union formation in 2015–16, and its defeat, marked the beginning of the decline of this phase, despite some sporadic struggles thereafter.

The end of the Honda struggle saw an important shift in the nature of repression that workers faced, and the counterstrategies of capital. In the Honda Tapukara plant, on 16th February 2016, the workers stopped production, went on strike and sat inside the plant. In response, there was decisive administrative and police action. After a massive *lathi* charge, police arrested and jailed workers booking them under severe charges like attempted murder within a few hours. Earlier, such police action would have come after days of negotiations with

the workers, and involvement of the labour department and other officials. The second aspect is that the heightened repression meant peaceful protests and demonstrations or any kind of workers' assembly in the entire industrial belt was made impossible for several months. The third aspect was that after terminating 3,000 workers which included permanent, contract and other temporary workers, the management resumed production with a new set of temporary workers within a month. The new advanced machinery in the plant did not require long training periods and the skill of permanent workers anymore. Other forms of crackdown on collective power on the shop floor and on unions took place in the entire belt. In one instance, the administration cancelled the registration of the Bellsonica Auto Components India Employees Union, citing union membership being extended to a contract worker in their plant as the ground.

The life imprisonment of the leadership of Maruti Suzuki union in 2017 reflects the same determination of the capitalist class and the state machinery to terrorize the workers and throttle any incipient militancy, by making an example of the MSWU leadership.

Apart from the defeat of Honda Tapukara workers and life imprisonment of the Maruti leadership, another incident also points to a watershed moment in this region. Hero Honda (now Hero MotoCorp) set up its most advanced two-wheeler production plant, its third in the region, in the Neemrana

industrial region. They started production, and continue to operate without a single permanent worker. All workers employed at the factory then and now are contract and temporary workers. Consequently, the question of union formation does not arise. In the last few years, as it has been shown in previous chapters, the process of informalisation and segmentation of labour regime, new technological changes, flight of capital and attacks on workers' struggle (along with new labour laws) have resulted in weakening of the trade union framework and a decline in trade union struggle.

Lean Production[10] and its Internal Contradictions

Why and how did this transformation take place? Arguably, the core reason was a very specific contradiction in the process of production. This production process, innovated by Toyota and brought to India by Japanese dominance in the automobile industry, is known as 'lean' production or Toyota model of production. Coupled with this, there was a 'just-in-time' approach to inventory, where the company did not keep stocks of the components and equipment they might need, and instead acquiring them only when needed.

The major investment in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Neemrana industrial region came from Japan. By 1998, the majority stakeholder in Maruti Suzuki was Suzuki Motor Corporation. Maruti had an immense amount of influence in shaping its supply chain in this region. The leading automakers were Hero

Honda and Honda. Among leading vendor companies, most were either joint ventures with Japanese companies, or the companies from Japan. Even those vendor companies which were not Japanese adapted this production and labour regime as part of standardisation and requirement of lead firms. In the first decade of 2000s, the Indian version of 'lean production' got deeply entrenched in the automobile production process in this region.

The massive profit accumulation by auto firms and the labour militancy of 2005–2015 are both results of this Indian variant of the Japanese lean production regime. Lean production techniques marked a departure from the Fordist mass production process by trying to revolutionise the labour process itself. It tried to incorporate the tacit knowledge of workers acquired during the production process and use it to continually improve the production and labour organisation through various innovations in the labour process: quality circles, *kaizen*, product and process flexibility etc. Unlike the almost complete separation of planning and execution in the Fordist mass production regime, lean production, at least in the upper tier of production networks, tried to encourage a limited active role of workers in the production process. The results were impressive both in terms of scale and scope of production, and continuous improvement on the production process. The permanent workers in the lead firms and leading vendor companies (i.e. at the nodes and upper tiers of

production networks) were supposed to be 'trustworthy' and 'cooperative' in this process for it to be successful. But on the other hand, to run successfully the just-in-time production process, capital needed complete control of production and labour process. Uncertainties and disturbances were abhorred in this regime. It meant that the workers needed to be 'docile.'

This was the core contradiction of the lean production regime and its labour process. On the one hand, the active engagement in the labour process with modern techniques increased the agency, subjectivity and confidence of workers on the shop floor. This went against the requirement of absolute obedience and docility, even under the dehumanised working conditions of intense workload and being almost an appendage of machines, from the lean and just-in-time production. This situation created a moving contradiction between capital and labour in the 'lean' and 'just-in-time' labour process on the shop floor which proved to be very difficult to reconcile. The production and labour process required accommodating labour subjectivity and active cooperation of workers for maximum efficiency while it also required the suppression of labour subjectivity and dehumanising working conditions for stability.

Another important aspect of this contradiction was that between the workers' sense of ownership over the production and labour process and their actual control. The first decade of 2000s was also a period of major experimentation of Japanese

and their allied Indian capital to find out the 'local adaptation' of the 'best practices' of lean and just-in-time production suitable for the Indian market, available labour force, new suitable technologies and institutional frameworks. That meant that the role and active engagement of workers were quite important to essentially 'set up' the factories over several years with best concrete use of general strategies and a broad set of machineries and technologies as per requirement. Maruti workers during their struggles in 2011–12 used to say, "We set up this factory." They used to recall how they helped setting up different workstations in the assembly line, or how they made the 'flexi-line' operational during the high demands after the economic crisis of 2007–08. The indispensable active role of workers was needed by capital at that time. This developed for the workers an enhanced sense of ownership and confidence in the particular set of skills. As the production process got more standardised, capital started exerting more ownership over the production line. However, it was difficult for capital to fully repress the developed sense of ownership and control over the production process on the shop floor. Maruti workers demanded 60 seconds of 'cycle time' instead of 40–45 seconds, 15 minutes of tea breaks instead of 7.5 minutes, and more work stations in lines.

The irreconcilable nature of this moving contradiction manifested as intense labour militancy and various counter strategies of capital in response to it. Workers' subjectivity and

their claim over production and labour process were reflected in their demands of 'union formation' — a symbolic expression of collective power for institutionalised bargaining with capital. Struggle for union formation led to a sort of 'class formation' and 'class consciousness' in embryonic form at the factory level cutting across all sections of workers — permanent, apprentice, contract, trainee, etc. — as they had similar working conditions and feelings of suppression. The Honda workers' success in 2005 motivated workers in other factories, and there was a process of 'class formation' at the regional level which developed up to a certain extent. But, as we have seen, this expression of collective agency could not be reconciled with the requirements of strict discipline and obedience needed to run a just-in-time supply chain, and so capital had to innovate in the class struggle.

New Developments in the Class Struggle and the Rise of 'Techno-Despotism'

Capital had two choices. The first was to recognise and accommodate/co-opt labour subjectivity, by conceding to some demands and creating a deeper mutual trust to further develop a participatory lean production model. The other was to crush the workers' struggle and sap them of all hope, ensuring their docility. There was a hesitant period of several years, where multiple counter-strategies were tried, with partial success (as discussed in previous chapters). But, in the end, the second option emerged as the clear winner.

There were a few favourable conditions behind this decisive shift: (i) emergence and availability of a new set of technologies under the so-called 'Industry 4.0,' which increased control and surveillance inside the factory and over the production network and made skill redundant and so permanent workers disposable; (ii) the huge reserve army of labour, making labour cheap and plenty, and so retrenchments easier; (iii) the increasing pro-business attitude of government(s) making decisive repression on labour militancy easier. The government(s) started treating labour-capital disputes as a 'law and order' problem, prepared to make pro-business policies, concessions for relocation of capital, and pro-business labour law reforms. These conditions provided capital the opportunity to decisively control and suppress labour subjectivity and collective actions. This has consolidated a trend in the last few years in the sphere of production towards a different set of production and labour organisation, which may be called 'techno-despotic regime.' The new set of technologies like robotics, industrial internet of things, and big data increase the control of management and lead to disposability of labour. This allows capital to run a despotic production regime fueled by cheap, non-organised, temporary labour force even at the nodes and upper tiers of production networks.

This tendency can be generalised a bit further in the context of automobile clusters in India. The period between 2005–15 was

marked by labour militancy not only in the auto sector of Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal-Bhiwadi-Tapukara-Neemrana industrial belt, but also in almost all major auto clusters and new auto plants in India: Chennai-Sriperumbudur and surrounding auto belt in Tamil Nadu (Hyundai, MRF, Pricoletc), Pune-Nasik auto belt in Maharashtra (Bajaj plant in Chakan), Rudrapur-Haridwar auto belt in Uttarakhand, Ahmedabad-Dholera-Sanand auto belt in Gujarat, Bengaluru-Kolar auto belt in Karnataka, etc. At the height of labour militancy, clashes between workers and management took place resulting in death of management personnel in Graziano in Noida (2008), Pricol in Tamilnadu (2009), Maruti Manesar plant in Haryana (2012). Class formation beyond the factory premises, at the regional level, seems to be a visible tendency in all these industrial belts as well. The counter strategies of capital vis-à-vis the collective labour subjectivity and militancy — the tendencies of automation and application of new technologies, contractualisation and informalisation of work, attack on trade union framework and repression on workers struggle and criminalisation of workers, flight and relocation of capital, changes in legal-administrative and institutional framework — were in motion almost simultaneously in all these new industrial belts and automobile clusters. In the last few years, the decline of militant trade union struggle in all these clusters coincides with strengthening of a tendency towards a 'techno-despotic regime.'

If we look at new auto industries in different developing countries at the global level, this time period coincides with militant workers struggles in auto sectors in different countries exposing the capital-labour contradiction and conflict generated at the core of lean and just-in-time production regime, including China, Brazil, South Africa, etc. However, it requires further study to generalise the proposition at the global level that the capital in promised participatory lean production has exhausted its core promise and instead has chosen to consolidate a tendency towards a 'techno-despotic regime,' at least in the core production process of the automobile industry.

The transition from a promised participatory lean production regime (even when the 'promise' was quite illusory and was never actually fulfilled in the set up of developing countries like India) towards a 'techno-despotic regime' at the core of the production sphere has certain ramifications. Even in the most profitable companies in the most profitable sectors of the economy, precarious labour and super-exploitation will become the prevalent feature. The remnants of workplace democracy and right to association and collective bargaining will shrink and profit accumulation will have less distributive effects, resulting in more social inequality. With the new set of technologies, there is a general concern of increase of structural unemployment. These are serious concerns about the future of work.

Government Schemes and Corporate Scams

How do Government Schemes Aid Corporates to Underpay and Exploit India's Youth?

The extended interview with one of the worker leaders in this book, though to some extent particular to the Maruti struggle, contains within it the germs of something more general. It underscores, among other things: the steady increase in the extent to which the labour process is automated; the concomitant lowering of the skill barrier to work these jobs; and the concurrent impulse felt by manufacturers to shift towards a predominantly contractually engaged workforce. More robot-assisted or automated processes mean fewer and less skilled workers, whose professional and personal lives become increasingly itinerant and precarious.

Such a workforce will, naturally, approach the state for relief and the promise of regular employment. Over the last decade, the Indian state has primarily responded to this growing demand by floating a large number of skill development

programs under the umbrella of National Skills Development Mission, popularly known as Skill India. These programs claim to offer on-site training, internships, and certifications. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that these government schemes have largely failed to achieve their stated goal of upskilling workers, thereby affording them the chance to secure regular employment. Instead, we argue that these schemes have been used by manufacturers as a source of low-cost and disposable labour.

Increasing Unemployment among Indian Youth

In spite of India's continued economic growth, with the Reserve Bank of India projecting a 6.5% GDP growth this financial year, this economic growth has not been accompanied by a concomitant growth in employment.[11] This disproportionately impacts India's youth. The India Employment Report 2024 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that 83% of India's unemployed workforce comprises youth aged 15–29 years.

In the same report a number of disturbing features of the Indian labour market came to light, from which we quote a few excerpts that show how unemployment is affecting the Indian youth aged between 15–29:

> "The youth unemployment rate was significantly higher than the adult unemployment rate, which increased over time... The youth unemployment rate increased more than twofold between 2000 and 2019, from 5.7% to 17.5%, but then decreased to 12.4% in 2022.[12]
>
> "The youth LFPR [Labour Force Participation Rate] dropped by 12 percentage points between 2000 and 2022, from 54% to 42%... The lower LFPR among young people... is primarily driven by their pursuit of education, which can enhance their prospects of achieving better labour market outcomes in the future.[13]
>
> "Although there was a rise in youths in regular employment over the past two decades, this does not necessarily indicate improvement in employment quality: A large portion of them lacked a written contract, a long-term (three or more years) contract and social security benefits.[14]

Over 12 million young Indians enter the workforce every year. Thus, each of these observations from the ILO report are causes for alarm. In a nutshell, more and more young Indians today find themselves unemployed than two decades ago.

Interrogating the Role of Education Amidst India's Youth Unemployment Woes

In order to escape unemployment, Indian youth are more likely to delay their entry into the workforce by pursuing education and skills training. Despite this, the quality of available employment remains poor, offering little stability and security. For instance, in 2022, 2 out of 3 unemployed persons in India were educated youth (with secondary or higher education). Numerous media reports have highlighted ILOs findings — which are corroborated by an independent report out of Azim Premji University — that indicate youth unemployment *increases* with education at all levels.[15]

Vocational education and training in India has been historically neglected. The necessity of vocational training and skill development as a means to supply the Indian economy with a skilled workforce has been discussed often in post-independent India, and has gained even greater prominence in recent decades.[16] In response to this gap, in 2015, the National Skill Development Mission was launched, which saw the announcement of flagship programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), among others.

In their evaluation of the Skill India Mission, Mehrotra and Sharma argue that the existing skilling programs in India have failed miserably and the skill development landscape requires a comprehensive overhaul.[17] Most of these programs offer short term and low quality training, which provide a certificate to the candidates, but in real terms do not equip them with any real skills to become employable. The other important and interconnected aspect that they highlight is the low placement rate of candidates who complete these programs. They write: "India, which is already suffering from high educated unemployment, in the future is moving towards the problem of skill underutilisation and over-education (or 'degree mania'). Mere rhetoric and inflated statistics will no longer suffice."

In the following section we critically examine some government programs and schemes which aim to address the skill gap amongst Indian youth, and highlight their shortcomings, to see if some general lessons may be drawn from them collectively.

Skill Development Programs

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

The stated goal of the PMKVY was to provide industry-relevant short-term skill training and certification to improve employability. There are, of course, the usual troubles plaguing government programs, such as underutilisation of

allocated funds. (As an example: under PMKVY 3.0, in 2021–22, only 72% of the allocated Rs. 1,438 crore was utilised.) Other issues faced by the program include lack of equipment and misappropriation of funds by training centers.[18] An example of what the life of a PMKVY trainee is like might be useful. This is from NSK Rane, a vendor for Maruti Suzuki:

> "From last year, Student Trainees, whom the workers call RCMT as they have come from [Rudrapur College of Management and Technology (RCMT)] (Uttarakhand) and have RCMT written on their dress, have joined the workforce under [the] "Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna." They work in the core production process and attend a class each week on Sunday. They get a stipend of Rs. 8,000, but in hand salary is Rs. 5,500 as the remaining part is shown as expenditure for shelter (provided by company) etc. They are not in the pay-roll of the company, and their only record with the company is the 'in/out' register at the company gate.[19]

A more serious problem facing the PMKVY is its inability to place its trainees: under PMKVY 2.0, only 23% of the 91.4 lakh candidates were placed. The scheme, since its inception, has been able to place fewer than one in four trainees.[20] Rozgar Melas organised by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) have not been successful: the 1,577

Rozgar Melas organised so far have resulted in 2.6 lakh candidates getting shortlisted (not necessarily hired) by prospective employers, which is a measly 163 candidates per mela, indicative of the lack of sufficient participation by industries. This is in part because industry partners in this scheme cite the lack of alignment between industry requirements and courses and practical skills imparted to trainees.[21] As of PMKVY 4.0, the most recent iteration of the scheme, the MSDE has solved the problem of low placements by simply delinking placements from skills training.[22]

National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship recognises that only an estimated 4.69% of the total workforce in India has undergone formal skill training.[23] To encourage practical training at industrial facilities, the NAPS scheme aimed to incentivise employers to participate in apprenticeship training by paying ¼ of the stipend owed to apprentices. (A similar scheme run by the Ministry of Education called the National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) has the government sponsoring ½ of the stipend, but is only applicable to graduate apprentices.)

As with the PMKVY, industry engagement is far below what was expected: of the 1.4 lakh establishments registered with the scheme, a little under 26,000 of them (or 18.3%) were actually

engaged in apprentice training. Enrollments are well below projections: the scheme hoped to train 50 lakh apprentices before 2020, and only 13.4 lakh apprentices (or 26.8% of the goal) were trained as of the end of 2021. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the enforcement mechanisms that ensure compliance are incredibly weak; industries, on the other hand, claimed that compliance costs were too high. Furthermore, actual expenditure on the schemes has remained low.[24] Finally, it should be noted that unlike the PMKVY, the NAPS has no mandate to ensure placements![25]

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya — Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)

The DDU-GKY scheme is aimed at rural youth between the ages of 15–35 and aims to provide skills and employment to marginalised sections of the rural workforce below the poverty line.

As far as placements go, the DDU-GKY claims to have placed close to 65% of its trainees, head and shoulders above its fellow Skill India schemes.[26] These numbers should be interpreted cautiously, though, since a number of cases of fraud (involving misreporting the number of trainees and placements, among other financial irregularities) have been uncovered by auditors. For example, in Kerala the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) found that 32% of placement claims were fraudulent, and in Odisha auditors found that 77% of placement claims

were fabricated, prompting the CAG to order a full investigation.[27] Additionally, the employment obtained as part of this and other Skill India schemes is often for very brief durations of time, and the pay is nowhere near what might be considered a living wage.[28]

The plague of low placement rates has prompted the Center to revise how it counts successfully placed trainees. It is expected that the new metric will factor in those trainees who go on to do gig work or are self-employed as successful beneficiaries of the scheme.[29]

Prime Minister's Internship Scheme (PMIS)

PMIS was first launched with the Union Budget 2024. The official website states that the objective of this program was to provide internship opportunities to India's youth by offering internships for a duration of 12 months in 500+ companies over a period of five years.

The eligible age group for this scheme was limited between 21–24 years, which already excludes a large section of unemployed youth in India. An amount of Rs. 4,500 per month will be paid by the government, while Rs. 500 will be provided by the company's CSR funds. In addition a one time grant of Rs. 6,000 will be provided by the government for incidental and miscellaneous expenses.

In its first round, what the government called the first pilot round, out of 1.27 lac opportunities that were posted, only 82,077 internship offers were made to 60,866 candidates. Of these less than half of the offers (28,141) were accepted. It is reported that only about 8000 candidates eventually joined the internships. Maruti Suzuki India Limited provided the second highest internship opportunities among all companies, with 12,444 opportunities.[30]

There are multiple causes for the failure of this scheme in its pilot phase, but the main cause is the low remuneration offered to the interns which makes the scheme very unattractive for India's unemployed youth. It has been reported that due to the low remuneration people are unable to even travel to the locations of their designated internships.[31] The pay offered to PMIS interns is far below what many companies are offering for internships for similar profiles.[32]

National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM)

Introduced by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 2013, NEEM intended to improve employability by providing on-site vocational training to so-called NEEM trainees. The duration of training was fixed to be between 3–36 months and, as with the other schemes, did not imply an offer of employment or statutory contributions such as Employees' State Insurance (ESI) and Employees' Provident Fund (PF).

The NEEM scheme was discontinued in 2022. What went wrong? Employers began to use NEEM trainees as a new category of temporary employee, chiefly since they were cheaper and the employers were not obligated to make ESI and PF contributions. For example, in the case of India Japan Lighting Ltd. in Bawal:

> "They get no ESI, PF, no company dress, no identity card of the company (instead, they get an [identity card] from National Employability Enhancement Mission, the organisation that mediates the process and supplies workers). There is only a [register] at the factory gate where they have to sign for 'in/out'. They get no other facility apart from canteen and bus facility. They are given no extra training and work in production lines. In each shift, there is a NEEM supervisor along with company supervisors. They are all from outside Haryana, states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc.[33]

The requirement that training imparted to NEEM beneficiaries was to adhere to the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) was disregarded too. Further, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) flagged coverage issues since NEEM trainees did not technically qualify as apprentices (as per the Apprentices Act, 1961) and were therefore technically employees. Finally, since there was no limit imposed on the number of NEEM trainees an employer

could take on, employers began funneling new joinees through the NEEM route to cut down on labour costs.

It should be noted, before closing this section, that there are significant criticisms we do not discuss here of the various programs under the Skill India Mission banner that focus on the emphasis placed on skills training in the New Education Policy (2015).[34] In essence, the vocationalisation of education currently underway must be seen in conjunction with the budget cuts for education, thereby effectively coming at the cost of compromising on quality primary and secondary school education. This ultimately serves to limit the aspirations and social mobility of large swathes of our citizens, who will find themselves trapped in the informal sector, in working conditions that are unsafe and unstable, and with little to no means of redressal or escape.

Who Gains from the Indian Government's Skilling Initiatives?

While the Indian state continues to expend considerable efforts and resources on skilling initiatives through a wide range of government programs and schemes, unemployment amongst Indian educated and skilled youth remains rampant. So who is the true beneficiary of these state-led skilling initiatives?

This puzzle can only be solved if we look at the skill development ecosystem alongside the transformations taking

place in the nature of employment in Indian industries. Across sectors, we are witnessing industries and corporate houses push growing fractions of the workforce into temporary employment in order to keep wages low and raise profits, often using legislation that codifies, normalises, and therefore perpetuates this informalisation further. Notably, the four new labour codes have further eased the path for industries to exploit workers in several ways. This is most evident through recognising Fixed Term Employment or FTE. Thus, workers can be engaged for work for a fixed period through the execution of written contracts with them, which may or may not be renewed after the expiry of the said term, creating perpetual fear of foreseeable unemployment.

Despite employment generation being a consistent goal of post-liberalisation governments, it is useful to recall that this goal was always balanced against the desire to have a so-called "flexible" labour market. This took two principal forms: amending legislation to make retrenchment easier, and gradually replacing permanent employees with a contractually engaged workforce. The last three decades of feverishly pursued deregulation, aimed at 'unshackling' these 'titans of industry' from the 'burden' of ensuring safe and secure employment has led us to the present juncture, where economists estimate that *even if* India's economy continues to grow like clockwork at 7% per annum, we will add 30 lakh new unemployed people to the labour force every year.[35]

Labour, when viewed solely as a market commodity, is merely a cost of production, and a predominantly contractualised workforce is a boon to industry because this cost of production can be balanced against short-term demand. Some even suggest that contracts 'liberate' the worker and 'unleash their entrepreneurial spirit.' Of course, this is an idiotic way to look at labour and its relation to capital, since it ignores the fundamental inequality that this relationship is built upon. Low wages mean working class families cannot afford access to medical care and education; long hours mean workers cannot rest adequately, hastening the onset of illness and injury; precarity brings about anxiety and depression.

How Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. Benefits from State-Led Skilling Initiatives

This last issue — the progressive segmentation of the workforce and the aggressive push towards contractualisation — is pernicious. It is useful to here quote Archana Agarwal's *Labouring Lives: Industry and Informality in New India* at some length, discussing the automobile industry and Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. (MSIL) in particular:

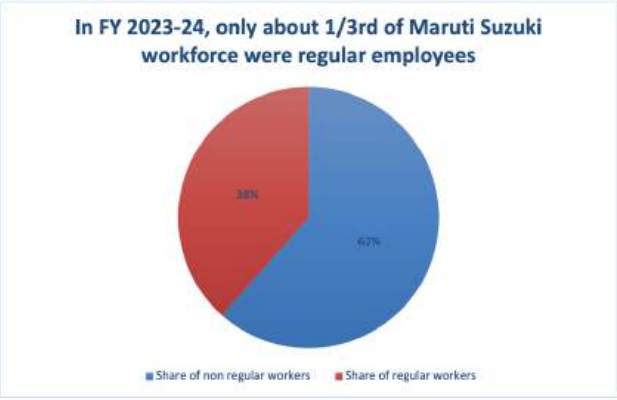
> "Permanent workers in the automobile industry are being replaced by contract workers, trainees of various kinds, apprentices, helpers, etc. There isn't much difference in their work, but the wages differ significantly...[36]

"By the mid-2000s, MSIL had moved a long way in recruiting workers on short-term contracts through multiple labour contractors. These workers received around a quarter of the wages of regular workers. By 2007, the contract workers in the Gurgaon plant of MSIL were more than double of regular workers. One of the three plants of MSIL in Manesar had only 10% regular workers... In the aftermath of the labour dispute in 2011–2012, MSIL Manesar made changes that created a more segmented workforce. Since an important demand by workers had been the regularisation of contract workers, the company started directly recruiting 'company casuals,' 'temporary workers,' or 'company temps' in place of contract workers. The company hires Temporary Workers (TWs) as fresh recruitment under the company payroll for seven months. After seven months, a fresh batch is recruited..."[37]

"In yet another process, diploma-holders or B. Tech. degree holders are taken in as 'trainees' for one to three years, under categories such as 'Diploma Trainee (DT),' 'Diploma Apprentice,' 'Engineering Trainee,' 'Diploma Engineering Trainee,' etc. More recently, 'student trainees' have been recruited under mission NEEM... Not considered 'workers,' they are paid a 'stipend' equivalent to minimum wages. They are

> subject to a code of conduct under the Apprentice Act and can be thrown out (and certificate withheld) if they are perceived to have misbehaved. Then there are trainees under PMKVY. They are not paid anything or provided with any food in the canteen. All they receive is a 'dress' and a certificate at the end of the 'training.'[38]

Based on data extracted from the annual reports for the financial year 2023–24 (the latest year for which reports are available) we found that only about ⅓ of Maruti Suzuki workforce were regular employees.[39] Most regular employees are limited to management and supervisory roles alone. Majority of the production at MSIL plants today is dependent on the labour of non-regular workers.



In their recently published pamphlet, the workers from the Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS) describe the

implementation of state-led traineeship programs at MSIL and the ways in which they have transformed the recruitment practices in the company.[40] Here were quote at length from their pamphlet to provide a close view of how various categories of trainees become a source of cheap and easily exploitable labour for companies.

> "Maruti Suzuki Trainee (MST) workers are trained under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) for one to two years at the Maruti Suzuki Training Academy in various trades within Automotive Manufacturing. The program is supported by various schemes such as the PMKVY and is supposed to create workers with a wide skill base so that they can effectively contribute in various occupational settings.
>
> "The National Employment Enhancement Mission (NEEM) workers also worked in Maruti Suzuki in previous years... The scheme was discontinued in 2022, given widespread misuse by employers where NEEM trainees were found to be engaged in main production operations without receiving any practical training. However, the various schemes put in place to replace the NEEM training program continue to be plagued by the same problems.

The trainees, in particular:

> "... learn just one small skill, working at one station on the assembly line and doing the same work as a permanent worker in their line. However, in violation of the principle of equal pay for equal work, they are given a mere stipend. The catch lies in the fact that with rapid automation, there is a decisive trend of deskilling workers in capital-intensive sectors such as automobile manufacturing. The skill required to manage a station requires no more than one week of training. At the same time, new skills get outdated very fast due to technological change, making the present system of upskilling a failed endeavor from the start.

In concluding, we may glean from the above examples of government schemes in action that there exists an irresoluble contradiction. A large number of government schemes have been launched over the past decade that aim to upskill workers, each facing its own specific difficulties. Yet one common thread runs through them: the dismal participation from and non-compliance of industries and MSMEs, who merely use apprentices/trainees as a pool of cheap labour to draw from and dispose of as they please. Our case of the MSIL and more broadly the automobile industry, has steadily pursued a program of increasing the fraction of temporarily employed workers of different kinds on the factory floor — Temporary Workers, employed for 7 months; Multi-Skill Technicians, employed for 2 years; Contract Workers, employed for 1 year;

Apprentices, employed for 1 year — with no effort at retention. Further, the strategy of retrenching entire batches of workers in one go — sometimes after as little as six months — and replacing them with another batch makes labour organising especially challenging.

As a representative example, over the past decade, the share of non-regular workers at Maruti Suzuki has steadily climbed, from 38% in 2013 to 62% in 2024. Further, most of the regular employees are limited to management and supervisory roles, while a majority of the production is dependent on the labour of non-regular workers.

This strategy — of replacing permanent workers with contract workers — depresses wages and keeps the workers in a

near-permanent state of distress, the exact opposite of what the Skill India mission claims to do.

Employment Data from Maruti Suzuki Annual Reports

Regular Employees											
Category	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Top and senior management				162	175	198	214	230	226	244	285
Mid management				300	303	323	334	339	367	425	317
Junior management				4,858	5,431	6,151	6,285	6,446	6,481	6,950	7961
Supervisors	5,878	6617	6981	2,933	3,143	3,450	3,367	3,259	3,414	3,585	3952
Associates	5,222	5354	5553	5,925	5,888	5,770	5,745	5,751	5,771	5,671	5713
Trainees (includes CTS, JETS, GETS)	1,447	814	725	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	12,547	12785	13259	14,178	14,940	15,892	15945	16,025	16,259	16,875	18228
Non-Regular Employees											
Category	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Apprentices	1,099	1164	1276	2,548	2,454	2,534	2,065	2160	2985	3242	3388
Temporary workers				5,908	5,908	3,845	4,137	7249	7989	5720	7555
Student trainees				1,070	2,117	3,045	3,088	3370	3564	3708	4041
Outsourced employees	6,578	8527	10626	8,975	9,096	8,881	8,047	8352	8490	8754	14221
Total	7,677	9,691	11,902	18,501	19,575	18,305	17,337	21131	23028	21424	29205
Total Employees (Regular/Non Regular)	20,224	22,476	25,161	32,679	34,515	34,197	33,282	37,156	39,287	38,299	47,433
Sources, Notes:											
1. Data extracted from Maruti Suzuki Annual Integrated Reports for FY 2023-24, FY 2019-20, FY 2015-16											
2. There is data discrepancy in Non-Regular employees for FY 2016-17 data, here data from FY 2019-20 report is considered.											

Annexure A: Timeline of the Struggle

The following timeline was constructed based on the PUDR report Driving Force, *the book* Japanese Management, Indian Resistance *by Anjali Deshpande and Nandita Haksar, statements or declaration of events of the union in various websites, statements/reports at https://marutisuzukiworkersunion.wordpress.com and social media posts of activists.*

1982. Maruti Udyog Ltd. (MUL) opened its first production facility in Gurgaon, Haryana. The Suzuki Motor Corporation holds a 26% share in the joint venture of Indian government

14 December 1983. The first car is manufactured in the Gurgaon plant.

September – October 2000. The Gurgaon plant union begins agitation, with slowdown, tool-down, and hunger strikes as negotiations with the management on incentive-linked wages remain inconclusive.

12 October 2000. The company declares a lock out, and makes signing of a 'good conduct bond' part of the conditions to re-join work. Workers' sit-in demonstration begins.

13 December 2000. Around 4,000 workers start agitating before the Indian parliament, occupying the parking lot at Udyog Bhavan in Delhi.

8 January 2001. Workers agree to settle with the management and re-join work. 36 workers remain dismissed and 17 suspended.

2003. Majority share of Maruti Udyog Ltd. sold to Suzuki Motor Corporation.

25 July 2005. Manesar Honda workers' struggle for union formation faces repression.

2006. The Maruti-Suzuki India Ltd. factory in Manesar is set up. Starts operation in 2007.

2011. Manesar workers asked to join the Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU). They refuse.

May 2011. Maruti Suzuki Employees' Union (MSEU) is formed at Manesar. Application for registration filed.

4 June 2011. A 13-day occupation of the Manesar factory begins. Demands include union rights.

5 June 2011. In response to the strike, the factory management seals off the gates.

6 June 2011. 11 worker leaders in the agitation are terminated.

8 June 2011. Trade union action committee is formed in Manesar with representatives of central trade unions and independent factory unions to support the struggle.

10 June 2011. The strike is declared illegal by the Haryana government.

17 June 2011. First factory occupation ends after a settlement is reached. All terminated and suspended workers are reinstated.

18 June – 28 August 2011. Work resumes, but the conflict between the workers and the management continues.

14 August 2011. The MSEU application for union recognition is rejected

28 August 2011. The company management declares lockout, making signing of a good conduct bond mandatory for all workers to join work. The workers refuse.

1 September 2011. A solidarity gathering is organised. Various unions supporting the Manesar workers participate.

14 September 2011. The strike spreads to other factories of Suzuki: Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Castings, and Suzuki Motorcycle join in a solidarity strike.

16 September 2011. Strike ends at Suzuki Powertrain.

30 September 2011. Lock-out ends. 'Good conduct' bond are signed. In the end, 57 workers are suspended.

3 October 2011. Workers rejoin. 1100 contract workers denied entry.

8 October 2011. Second factory occupation begins. Workers of Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki motorcycle also join strike and occupy factory. 12 other unions join solidarity strike.

13 October 2011. Court orders evacuation. Workers continue to protest outside the factory gates. Police cut off access to water and food.

21 October 2011
Workers agree to settle and join work. All permanent and contract workers join work but 30 workers from leadership, who get dismissed from work and get compensation.

End of 2011. Workers take fresh initiative to form a union. Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU) is formed. Registration application filed.

23 February 2012. MSWU successfully obtains registration.

1 March 2012. Union flag day is celebrated at the factory gate.

18 April 2012. Charter of demands submitted. The demands include end of contract system in the factory, workload reduction and an end to the incentive-linked wage scheme.

April – July 2012. Negotiations stall. Temporary suspension of union leaders reversed due to pressure.

16 July 2012. Workers limit hours, stop reporting early to the factory premises, and work only 8.5 hours in response.

18 July 2012. Violence in the factory. Supervisor abuses a worker. A manager dies in a fire due to asphyxiation. 55 workers are named in an initial FIR.

2 August 2012. Union leaders surrender, 147 workers are arrested.

22 August 2012. Factory reopens. 546 regular and 1800 contract workers are dismissed.

25 September 2012. Wage settlement with Gurgaon plant union, extended to permanent workers of Manesar plant.

7–8 November 2012. Dharna and hunger strike at DC Office, Gurgaon by terminated workers. All 149 jailed workers refuse to eat despite repression. Manesar factory workers plan to boycott lunch on 7th November, but 1,000 police officers are brought in to stop them.

12–13 November 2012. Workers observe *kali Diwali* (black Diwali). Workers march to the residence of Haryana's Minister of Industries & Commerce Randeep Surjewala.

9 December 2012. Auto Workers Convention and Rally. The convention is joined by workers from across Gurgaon -Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal-Ghaziabad-Faridabad-Noida industrial belt and various trade unions.

19 December 2012. Day-long protest demonstration in Jantar Mantar, New Delhi.

21–27 January 2013. Haryana-wide cycle rally and "Right to Justice" rally in Rohtak on the 27th of January. The cycle rally begins from Sirsa, Ambala, Faridabad, and Narnaul, all ending at Rohtak. Over 3,000 attend the final rally.

5 February 2013. All-India day of protest. Solidarity demonstration in over 15 states.

24 March–4 April 2013. Dharna and hunger strike in Kaithal, Haryana. The Chief Minister and the Industries Minister promise that the workers who do not have cases in their name will be taken back on duty. Hunger strike is called off in response to this, but the *dharna* continues till 18 May.

8 May 2013. Mahapanchayat at DC office, Kaithal, Haryana, attended by more than 2,000 people.

19 May 2013. *Gherao* of Industries Minister's residence in Kaithal. More than 100 workers in the *dharna* are arrested on 18th May. 1,500 workers begin march, and are stopped by 2,000 police with barricades, water cannons, and tear gas. Police *lathi* charge protestors.

1 June 2013. Protest demonstration and indefinite *dharna* in Kaithal. Workers face 2,000 policemen at Mini Secretariat, Kaithal. Protest continues at the DC's office.

18 June 2013. Maruti workers join farmers' rally in Mehsana to Gandhinagar, Gujarat, protesting land acquisition by Maruti. Attended by over 4,000 farmers.

2–11 July 2013. Demonstrations in Kaithal, Faridabad, Kurukshetra, Rewari, and Chandigarh.

18 July 2013. First *Chalo* Manesar Day in solidarity with jailed workers. Huge police force deployed in Manesar and Gurgaon. March is prevented.

27 October 2013. Protest demonstration in Kaithal. Industries minister promises to initiate another round of tripartite negotiations between the workers, the Maruti management and the government.

11 December 2013. Imaan Khan gets bail. First of the arrested workers to get bail.

20–21 December 2013. 24-hour hunger strike by hundreds of terminated works and families of arrested workers in front of Gurgaon DC office.

15–31 January 2014. Maruti Jan Jagran Yatra held. Protesters walk from Kaithal, Haryana to Delhi, a distance of over 150 km, demanding release of arrested workers.

April 2014. Panels put up by jailed leaders of MSWU win union elections in Manesar (4/4) and Gurgaon (26/4).

1 May 2014. May Day program at the Manesar plant gates. Attended by workers from all four plants of Suzki.

16 July 2014. MSWU holds a rally in Kaithal, Haryana.

18 July 2014. Protest outside DC office, Gurgaon

25 February 2015. Two more workers get bail.

2 September 2015. Workers from across the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt join all-India strike against new labour laws.

26 September 2015. Temporary workers strike for wage hike, get *lathi*-charged.

16 April 2016. MUKU offers Rs. 50,000 each to families of 36 arrested workers.

1 May 2016. May Day rally, joined by 700–800 Maruti workers.

11 August 2016. 18 workers get bail, leaving 16 still in jail.

2 September 2016. Strike and rally across Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt. Manesar plant at a complete standstill.

1 March 2017. 6th Union day rally at Manesar. Joined by over 30 unions.

10 March 2017. 31 workers are convicted — 13 for murder — and 117 are acquitted. 22 convicted workers are released for time served.

11–17 March 2017. Solidarity demonstrations around the country: Bhilai, Chennai, Kolkata, Ludhiana, Mumbai, Rudrapur, etc. On 16th March, more than 1 *lakh* workers boycotted lunch and dinner in nearly 50 plants in Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal-Neemrana industrial belt and beyond.

17 March 2017. 13 workers are sentenced to life imprisonment. This includes all the MSWU office bearers. Two have died since then.

23 March 2017. First major rally in Manesar since 18 July 2012. Thousands march, ignoring the imposition of Section 144.

4–5 April 2017. All India Protest Day and Global Solidarity Day for Maruti workers. Demonstrations in over 30 cities in 15 states, and many countries also.

18 July 2017. 1,000-worker rally in Gurgaon on fifth anniversary of the event demanding justice for jailed workers.

1 March 2018. Seventh flag day of MSWU at Manesar plan gate.

18 March 2018. Mazdoor Sabha on the one-year anniversary of sentencing.

4 November 2018. Wage agreement of MSMS with management.

18 July 2020. MSMS takes out a protest march for justice with jailed workers despite Covid-19 pandemic.

2 December 2020. MSMS marches in support of farmers' protest.

2022. The workers sentenced to life imprisonment are out on bail. Appeals are pending, and the struggle continues.

18 September 2024. Indefinite dharna of terminated workers begins at Manesar Tehsil.

30 September 2024. Mazdoor Sabha takes place. 300

terminated workers, family members and many unions attend.

10 October 2024. Suspended workers begin a relay hunger strike.

18 October 2024. '*Chalo* IMT Manesar' rally is conducted. Workers, families, unions, and journalists attend. Mazdoor Sabha held at Manesar Tehsil.

5 January 2025. Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh (MSAMS) is founded. Their demands include permanent and secure jobs, equal pay, and selection in the new Kharkhoda plant as permanent workers from past non-permanent staff.

10 January 2025. Charter of Demands submitted. More than 5,000 non-permanent workers gather outside the DC Office, Gurgaon. Labour Department schedules the next meeting for 31th January. A rally in Manesar is planned for 30th January.

27 January 2025. A civil suit is filed. Court allows peaceful protest, bans proximity to factory.

29 January 2025. Police crackdown and forcible removal of 6-month long dharna at Manesar Tehsil

30 January 2025. Over 100 workers detained before the rally called by MSAMS begins. Section 144 imposed.

31 January 2025. Workers are detained from Gurgaon court.

Sec 144 imposed in Gurgaon.

19 March 2025. 'Delhi *Chalo*' call and demonstration at Jantar Mantar by MSAMS. Over 5,000 workers send letters to the Prime Minister.

6 April 2025. 'Kharkhoda *Chalo*' rally by MSAMS and Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee. Police detain workers all day.

Annexure B: Copy of Demand Notice of Terminated Maruti Workers Submitted in Gurgaon Labour Court

REGISTER/A.D. & COURIER

To,

The Managing Director
Maruti Suzuki India Limited
Plot-1, Phase 3A, Sector-8
IMT Manesar
Gurgaon, Haryana

SUB:- LEGAL DEMAND NOTICE U/S 2(A) OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES ACT, 1947 - ILLEGAL AND MALAFIDE TERMINATION OF SERVICES OF SH. ..... S/O SH. .....

Sir,

It is respectfully stated to you

1. That I, ... S/o. Sh. .....resident of ....., ..., Staff No. ....., am a permanent worker of the Maruti Suzuki India Ltd., Manesar (Hereinafter referred to as management). I, on ....., joined the management as a technician trainee, and worked in ..... I completed the three years of my training period successfully, working with my full skill, discipline and commitment. Acknowledging my skill, attendance and discipline, the company management accorded me the post of JA-1 as a permanent employee on ..... with a monthly salary of Rs. .....

2. That I performed my duties with the management with full responsibility continuously and uninterruptedly till 18.07.2012. I was falsely implicated for an incident in the plant on that very day and was terminated by the management on 16.08.2012. I received a 'Termination Letter' dated 16.08.2012 signed by T. Ohashi, Director of the management of Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) and M.E.O (Production). Through the same received letter, I got to know that from 16th August 2012, my services from Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. had been terminated all

of a sudden.

3. That on 18.07.2012, I came in the B shift and worked in the .....Department On enquiring from the workers of A shift I got to know that in the morning, before the tea break there had been some confrontation between a worker called Jiyalal and his supervisor Sangram Kishore in which the supervisor used insulting language towards the worker and also passed casteist remarks. Seeing this, other workers working at that spot protested against this behaviour of the Supervisor and the union representatives were called, who immediately reached the location. The Union representatives addressed an appeal to the workers and said, "All workers are requested to continue doing their work peacefully and remain at their stations". They also said that the union representatives will talk to the management about this incident very soon.

4. On reaching my work station I also asked my other fellow workers about the tense atmosphere in the company and the movement of the bouncers inside the factory premises, and got the reply that. "We are also feeling suspicious of these unknown people roaming about in the company in uniform." After that I started working to maintain perfect discipline and like every day worked according to the production target and the

quality standards set for production.

5. I got to know from workers from the A shift that till 1pm the Union representatives held discussion with the management at the shop floor itself and demanded that some action be taken against the misbehaviour faced by Jiyalal at the hands of the supervisor. However the management in a well-planned manner desisted from taking any action against the supervisor involved and on the contrary conspiratorially suspended Jiyalal instead. At 3pm negotiation started between the management and the Union representatives on this issue in the office. I do not know what transpired between them because I was doing my work.

6. At around 7:15 pm, our supervisor, under the direction of the manager said that "The situation in the company has become exceptional and all you workers leave the company premise in safety". On my way out with other fellow workers I saw that some unknown people/bouncers in the company's uniform. At that time, at 7:20pm, I also exited the company premises from gate no 2. Later on I heard that HR manager Awanish Kumar Dev, who was instrumental to help the workers form their union amidst opposition from the entire management, died of asphyxiation, and the company declared a lock-out.

7. That, there was a long course of events before this. Totally frustrated with the exploitative and oppressive system of the management, the workers of Maruti Suzuki decided to form a union in May, 2011. This was because the workers had by now well understood that there is no way to stop the atrocities/injustice being done by the Maruti Suzuki management except forming a union. The following are the kinds of oppression with which the workers of Maruti were fed up. The management took more work form the Workers than the capacity of the workers and therefore the work load was a lot. The workers had to run around to get the work done. The work was so much that there wasn't even a spare second to drink water from a bottle kept in front of the workers. The workers weren't even allowed to go to the toilet during work. Another reason was the lack of leave. PL and CL were given just in name. The plaintiffs would cut a huge amount from the incentives component in our salaries on availing PL and CL. The management had integrated the grant of PL and CL in a way such that workers couldn't take leave even in cases of great necessity out of fear of salary cut, for example, many workers have been forced to come for work even during serious illnesses. Workers/defendants had to think a hundred times before going to attend a close relative's wedding. In fact workers/defendants found it difficult to go even for the

death of their close relatives. Despite being an auto company, the company wasn't paying its workers even half of the average paid in other auto companies. Trainee workers were trainees only in name, while they had to do all the production work for the plaintiff organisation as done by a permanent worker. Salaries were cut according to the whims and fancies of the management. There was no clear policy from the side of the management with regard to salary cuts. Medical facilities were almost non-existent. Of the little that was available, workers could not avail of the check-up services. The workers working in Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) were victims of immense mental and psychological pressure, owing to which many workers would become victims of psychological diseases like depression, insomnia, and many thus would regularly have to take medicines for the curing of the same. The management of Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) used to make workers sign on many of blank papers then and now, and confiscate their I-cards regularly. Workers would be regularly threatened with stalling of their promotions, suspension and termination and filing of charge-sheets. The management of Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) would coerce workers into working overtime. And if the worker would be even late for a minute than the scheduled time of entry, then the entire day would be marked as absent and not paid, but he would still have

to work the day. The height of exploitation by the management of Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) happened when a supervisor (Paint Shop B), Pankaj Tiwari in the year 2011 slapped a worker named Rinku and making this an example of the correct behavior, the same supervisor was promoted to the post of Manager by the top management. This manager was notorious for making workers physically suffer by making them sit as 'murga' or 'chicken' for hours on end. No complaint could be registered against such inhuman practices as the threat of suspension and termination would loom large over workers.

8. That, due to the above mentioned reasons, in May 2011, workers in the Manesar plant contemplated forming an independent Union by the name of 'Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU). I was also active in this process of union formation. As the management did not allow the workers to exercise the fundamental right to form association in the form of their own union, at different point of times thereafter there were sustained labour disputes. Ultimately the workers, withstanding coercive attacks in different forms from the management, administration and police, ultimately succeeded to form their independent union in the Manesar plant on 23.02.2012. Even after the formation of the union, the management tried to weaken and

crush it by adopting various unjust means including the suspension of union leaders on utterly false ground, spreading rumours to create a divide among the workers, paying a deaf ear to the collective general charter of demand of the workers, to create unnecessary troubles and harass individual workers at various occasions. The incidents of 18.07.2012 were planned and triggered by the management from this mala fide intention to demolish the union process. I was an active member of this union and that is why I have been targeted by the management.

9. That my name is neither included in the FIR filed by the management on 18-07-2012 at 11:00 pm nor in the investigation report prepared by the SIT set up by the Haryana Government nor my name was mentioned by any of all the 92 witnesses from the management side during the trial in the Gurgaon Sessions Court. Such allegations in the termination letter, viz. participation in activities such as violence by the workers, attacking and injuring the management and setting fire to the office are utterly baseless, false, and apocryphal and have been maliciously levelled against me.

10. That my termination letter discusses the settlement on the 16th June, 2011, 30th September 2011 and 19th October 2011. In my understanding, these compromises were in relation to the demands of the

workers for their own union and it is a constitutional right of the workers to form a union. It is to be noted that through the inconsistent behaviour of the management this dispute is brought into light time and again.

11. That the facts mentioned in paragraph 4 of the termination letter are false and invalid. It is false to submit that the management has terminated my employment under Sec. 35 and it is further false to submit that the plaintiff has not maliciously terminated me. I wish to return the money that has been deposited in my account in relation to my illegal termination and I have already sent a letter to the Maruti management signifying such a wish and enquiring about the procedure for the same.

12. That as such my services were terminated by the management on 16.08.2012 itself. The said termination is totally illegal, bad, unjust and malafide for the following amongst other reasons.

    (i) That the job against which I was working is of a regular and permanent nature of job which is still continuing with the management and I cannot be thrown out of job in the manner it has been done. That I am fully innocent and I have not committed any misconduct and in case

of any alleged misconduct, no memo or charge-sheet was ever served upon me and no domestic enquiry was conducted against me and nor I was afforded any opportunity of being heard. My services were terminated illegally and arbitrarily without following the principles of natural justice.

(ii) That in the 'Speaking order' of the termination letter mentioned above, the ground of termination has been described as 'loss of confidence' or 'forfeiture of confidence' but the allegations viz. participation in activities such as violence by the workers, attacking and injuring the management and setting fire to the office are utterly baseless for which no domestic enquiry was conducted .

(iii) That the action of the management in terminating my services is because of my participation in the process of union formation and it amounts to unfair labour practice as provided in Section 2(ra) read with Item No. 5 of the Fifth Schedule of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

(iv) That the cited sections of standing order of the plant in case of my dismissal including section

32, 34, 35 are in violation with the Model Standing Order Act, 1946, The basic tenets of Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and the Constitutional Provisions.

(v) That the action of the management is also violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

(vi) That I have been meted out with hostile discrimination as juniors to me have been retained in service and he was thrown out of job. Even otherwise, fresh hands have been taken into the employment after terminating the services of me.

(vii) That, even otherwise, the impugned termination of services is violative of Section 25 F, G & H of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 read with Rule 76, 77 & 78 of the Central Industrial Rule 1957.

13. That I am totally unemployed since my termination i.e.16.08.2012 as detailed above.

14. That in respect of my illegal termination from service, the management had applied for post facto approval under Section 33(2)(b) of the Industrial Disputes Act,

1947, being Case No _____ before the Ld Labour Court and Industrial Tribunal No __, Gurgaon. Therefore, I had a bona fide belief that no approval would be granted to such an act of illegality and that in terms of the Constitution Bench judgement of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Jaipur Zila Sahakari Bhoomi Bank Ltd. v. Shri Ram Gopal Sharma (2002) 2 SCC 244, would be reinstated with all consequential benefits. It was on this account that I had not raised any independent industrial dispute earlier. However, vide order dated_____, the Ld Industrial Adjudicator has permitted the management to withdraw the said approval application and has even returned a finding contrary to the law to the effect that there was no pendency of any industrial dispute at the time of my termination. Without prejudice to my right to take legal action to impugn the said judgement, I have been advised that I should also seek a reference of my termination as an industrial dispute to be independently adjudicated. Therefore, the delay, if any, in raising the present industrial dispute is entirely bona fide and on account of lawfully pursuance of another parallel remedy.\nIn the circumstance I sent an advanced demand notice to you through registered post on ..... asking to reinstate me in service with continuity of service and full back wages with all consequential benefits thereof either monetary or

otherwise. It was communicated to you that I was ready and willing to join duties immediately and should you seek to reinstate me without prejudice to your rights pending an adjudication, I am also agreeable for the same as I am facing a penurious situation. I also communicated to you that in case the demand was rejected, I would be constrained to take appropriate legal action into the matter at your cost and consequences. But, till date there is no response to my letter from your side. So it is presumed that the demand has been rejected. In this case I am submitting the demand notice to the labour department, Gurgaon for appropriate legal action into the matter which should be at your cost and consequences.

Annexure C: Some Materials For Further Engagement

This is an incomplete list and a work-in-progress. Many websites, independent media outlets, journalists, and public intellectuals have written about the Maruti movement. Various trade unions, left and progressive organisations have released reports, pamphlets, papers, and notes on the Maruti movement as well. An archive of the movement is under construction at *Class Notes* which may be accessed on our website, once it is completed. We will try to upload articles and reports by different trade unions/workers organizations/workers magazines and political formations, which are not documented here, on the website.

Books

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News and Articles

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Many Straws Make a Nest: A Documentary about Proletarian unrest in Delhi's Industrial Belt
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Archives

Maruti Suzuki Workers Union Blog
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Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar
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Radical Notes
https://radicalnotes.org/?s=Maruti+Workers+Movement

Mehnatkash
https://mehnatkash.in

GroundXero
https://www.groundxero.in

Workers Unity
https://www.workersunity.com

List of Abbreviations

Below is a list of frequently used abbreviations, for easy reference.

AFL-CIO — American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial organisations
AI — Artificial Intelligence
AICTE — All India Council for Technical Education
AITUC — All India Trade Union Congress
ALC — Assistant Labor Commissioner
BJP — Bharatiya Janata Party
CAG — Comptroller and Auditor General of India
CGT — General Confederation of Labour, France
CITU — Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CL — Casual Leave
CM — Chief Minister
CRPF — Central Reserve Police Force
CSR — Corporate Social Responsibility
CSTU — Centre for Struggling Trade Unions
CW — Casual Worker
DC — Deputy Commissioner
DDU-GKY — Deen Dayal Upadhyaya - Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
DT — Diploma Trainee

DYFI — Democratic Youth Federation of India
ECU — Electronic Control Unit
EMI — Estimated Monthly Installment
EPFO — Employees' Provident Fund Organisation
ESI — Employees' State Insurance
FIR — First Information Report
FSL — Financial Services Line
FY — Financial Year
GDP — Gross Domestic Product
GPN — Global Production Network
HC — High Court
HMS — Hind Mazdoor Sabha
HR — Human Resources
ICLR — International Commission on Labor Rights
ICOR — International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and organisations
IDs — Identification [Card]s
IFFCO — Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative
IFTU — Indian Federation of Trade Unions
ILO — International Labour organisation
IMK — Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra
IMT — Industrial Model Township
INTUC — Indian National Trade Union Congress
IoT — Internet of Things
IPC — Indian Penal Code
ITI — Industrial Training Institute
JNU — Jawaharlal Nehru University

KCTU — Korean Confederation of Trade Unions
LAB — Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (Nationalist Workers' Committees), Basque Country, Spain
LFPR — Labour Force Participation Rate
MASA — Mazdoor Adhikar Sangharsh Abhiyan
MLC — Medico-Legal Certificate
MNCs — Multinational Corporations
MSAMS — Maruti Suzuki Asthayi Mazdoor Sangh
MSDE — Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
MSEU — Maruti Suzuki Employees' Union
MSIL — Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.
MSMEs — Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
MSMS — Maruti Suzuki Mazdoor Sangh
MST — Maruti Suzuki Trainee
MSWU — Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union
MUKU —Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union
MUL — Maruti Udyog Ltd.
NAPS — National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme
NATS — National Apprenticeship Training Scheme
NCR — National Capital Region
NEEM – National Employability Enhancement Mission
NGO — Non-governmental organisation
NSQF — National Skills Qualification Framework
NTUI — New Trade Union Initiative
OEMs — Original Equipment Manufacturers
PF — Employees' Provident Fund

PL — Privilege Leave
PMIS — Prime Minister's Internship Scheme
PMKVY — Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna
POID — Independent Democratic Workers' Party, Paris
PUDR — People's Union for Democratic Rights
PWC — Provisional Working Committee
RSS — Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RTI — Right To Information Act
SCC — Supreme Court Cases
SIT — Special Investigation Team
SMIEU — Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union
SPIEU — Suzuki Powertrain India Employees Union
TELCO — Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company
TW — Temporary Worker
UK — United Kingdom
UP — Uttar Pradesh
USA — United States of America
USP — Unique Selling Proposition/Point
UTUC — Union Trade Union Congress

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The Maruti Story is about the historic struggle of the workers of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant, India's largest automobile manufacturing unit, over the past two decades. It started on the shop floor, but quickly spread to the entire industrial belt and the larger society. Originally a militant struggle for union formation against the factory management, it grew to resiliently confront the capitalist class and state machinery while fighting for justice. It is also a struggle against the intensification, degradation, and informalisation of work, caused by pro-capital changes in technology and production that were fully supported by the state. This is a unique and instructive working class struggle in contemporary industrial capitalism in India, carrying generalised significance. This book is an attempt to document, contextualise, and understand this movement and the possibilities it holds for the future of Indian labour.

Class Notes is a collective comprising individuals from different professions and different areas of labour activism, aiming to engage with conceptual and practical questions around labour and class politics, document working class conditions and struggles, and organise solidarity activities for working class demands and struggles in India.

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